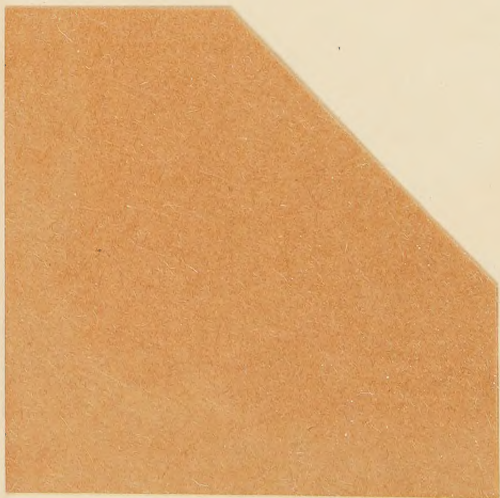


W. R. H.



750

LONDON BOROUGH OF GREENWICH

PLUMSTEAD LIBRARY

Plumstead High Street, SE18 1JL Phone: 854 1728/1759

	DATE OF RETURN	
METROPOLITAN JOINT FICTION RESERVE Stored at	PLUMSTEAD LIBRARY HIGH STREET LONDON SE18 1JL PHONE: 854 1728 or 1759	

Please quote number and last date stamped
if you wish to renew by post or telephone



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Some Critiques of Shaw Desmond's Books

NOVELS

PASSION

"A remarkable novel . . . the book is a vivid and startling piece of impressionism."—*Times*, London.

GODS

"Desmond's picture of Ireland is the most complete that has ever been drawn in fiction."—*New York Herald*.

DEMOCRACY

"The best political novel since *The New Machiavelli*."
—*Daily Express*, London

OTHER BOOKS

LABOUR: THE GIANT WITH THE FEET OF CLAY

"He has his vision. . . ."—*Times*, London.

"He urges an idea of God . . . a spiritual as opposed to a materialist concept of life, carrying with it some apprehension of a will and purpose behind the universe."
—*New York Times*.

THE DRAMA OF SINN FEIN

"Mr. Desmond is the Thomas Carlyle of the Irish struggle; and the opening chapters of his notable book are comparable in fire and force with 'The French Revolution.' "—*Bookman*.

"Mr. Shaw Desmond is a poet by nature. . . . He brings his actors on the stage, groups and disperses them with the art of the technician but with the abandon of the experienced stage manager."—*New York Times*.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

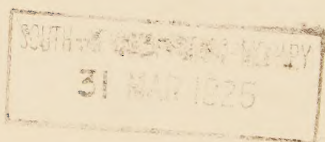
BY
SHAW DESMOND



DUCKWORTH

3 HENRIETTA STREET, LONDON, W.C.

First Published . . . 1925
(All rights reserved)



Made and Printed in Great Britain by
Wyman & Sons, Ltd., London, Fakenham and Reading.

To
MY WIFE, KAREN EWALD

The characters in "The Isle of Ghosts" are entirely fictitious.

CONTENTS

PART I

The Sowing

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	SHAUN	3
II	THE GULLY	11
III	"THEY THAT ENDURED . . ."	19
IV	A MORNING AT THE McCONKEYS	35

PART II

The Growing

V	"BRIAN BORU"	47
VI	THE WEST	59
VII	THE PRIEST	71
VIII	AT THE SIGN OF "THE SUN- BURST"	85
IX	SERGEANT MACGUIRE.	94
X	JASPER MORIARTY	98

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XI	THE STUDIO	105
XII	THE HOUSE ON THE QUAY	123
XIII	MATERNITY	131
XIV	HUSBAND AND WIFE	144
XV	HATE	156
XVI	GOOD FRIDAY	164
XVII	MORIARTY GOES TO THE CASTLE	173
XVIII	THE MAN WITH THE FACE OF A PRIEST	185
XIX	JASPER MORIARTY SPEAKS HIS MIND	199
XX	THE SHAN VAN VOCHT	212

PART III

The Blowing

XXI	THE BLACK NIGHT	221
XXII	"THE STONE JUG"	236
XXIII	THE HUNGER-STRIKE	242
XXIV	THE LIME-KILN	254
XXV	MAGGIE McCANN	268
XXVI	JUDAS	281
XXVII	THE PASSING OF BRIAN	296
	EPILOGUE	310

PART I

The Sowing



CHAPTER I

SHAUN

SHAUN the Watcher, one knife-blade of a shoulder up and the other down, sat with his little red-rimmed eyes searching from face to face at the long trestle table set on the high stage.

There was Jasper Moriarty, sitting down there at the other end of the table and looking like a Milesian saint out of a stained glass window with his curling black beard, long face and high, smooth forehead crowned with its halo of blue-black hair combed smoothly back behind the long close-set ears. There he sat, looking from face to face with those pale blue eyes of his with the tiny black irises, and biting the nails placed delicately between the bright red lips of the small bow-shaped mouth. Jasper, the sub-editor of the Dublin "Sniper" and a houseful of childer to keep on it and a little dumb wife who adored him. Jasper, the disappointed man, in his poor shiny serge, his black hair, for all its brilliantine, streaked with the grey hairs of hope deferred—and he with the sharpest pen and the sharpest tongue in Ireland; Jasper Moriarty, the man that nobody wanted.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

There he was, sitting there, a tall ascetic man maybe in the middle thirties with something beaten about his high, narrow head and the pale blue eyes that flickered sullenly as he listened to the others and bit the nails of the white slender fingers, and the eyes of him always coming back to Sheilah Shaw. And for what was he lookin' at her and he wid a wife and a houseful of childer on the quay ?

But sure he might as well be lookin' at the moon, for wasn't it well known that Sheilah, with the fire of her, never gave the look at anybody or anything but Ireland and Moriarty cryin' for her. What was it the ould song said ? :

*For when the cocks begin to crow
And winds are in the sky,
Oh ! Moira ! Moira ! are ye there ?
Ye'll hear Pat Naneen cry. . . .*

And nobody could say that Jasper Moriarty had not suffered for Ireland. Three times in jail, the last time for a long stretch because he couldn't control his pen in that dirty little clever rag "The Sniper," the pen that was always dipped in vitriol. Jasper who was always stickin' himself forward to head popular movements, or to try to head them, for always at the last moment somebody or other supplanted him—because nobody really wanted Jasper Moriarty.

It was as though nobody really trusted him, and he with a record as good or better than any

SHAUN

of them all, and fightin' to keep the little home together down there on the Ormonde Quay on thirty shillin's a week and doin' odd jobs and even sellin' a bit of antique stuff to keep the wolf from the door—and Molly doin' the bit of sellin' there was in the hand-me-down where you could buy anything from a suit of oilskins to a brass candlestick or a knuckleduster. And the peelers always afther him.

He wanted to lead the command in the House near the Viaduct and, as usual, another man, Big Shamus there, had got it without askin', over his head. There was something cursed about this broken man, sometimes he even thought there was murder in the pale black-pointed eyes, and then God knows what the end of him would be, and he the finest talker in Ireland and the brainiest of them all.

And there, near Moriarty, were the two Shamuses—Shamus “Beg” and Shamus “More.” Little Shamus with his rusty scrub of moustache and the tail of his checked shirt hanging out of the seat of his breeches, as usual—the dirty little ragamuffin with the soul of a saint who was always wantin' to die for Ireland, and Shamus More, “Big” Shamus, his friend, sitting by the side of him with his great Viking moustaches and an eye like blue water, with Shamus Beg hissing bloody murder from under the lea of his ear. And there was the Commandant himself, with his face shinin' like the face of Saint Patrick in the cathedral. Didd't he know them all.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Yes, and there was Sheilah Shaw herself, the woman to whom the pale eyes of Jasper Moriarty always returned as though she had a secret of his and feared that she might tell it on him. She the woman with the steady grey eyes and the little round breasts that showed themselves under the thin grey stuff of her dress to bring trouble to the minds of honest men. But, by God! now wasn't the time to be thinkin' of them things.

Yet, sure wasn't she sittin' there. The slender, grey-eyed, gentle woman with the young beautiful face, the smooth brown hair with the grey strands in it done low on the neck and the lights comin' and goin' in her eyes—the woman that looked like a grey cobweb against those high dingy walls, with the stage at wan end with them sittin' on it as though it was all set for a play. An' she thirty-two years an' all and looking like a young Blessed Mother only widout the Child.

But, by God! now wasn't the time to be thinkin' of them things.

Well, there they were and there was Ireland. How many of them, anyhow? A-shah! sure didn't the Commandant say there was twenty thousand and more to come and all Ireland waitin' to reel afther them? Didn't Jasper Moriarty himself say it?

Maybe it was and maybe it wasn't. (The red eyes shut themselves in the little sceptical way that they had.) Who knew anything about Ireland anyhow? The Commandant ought to know—but did he? Kitty the Divil sitting

SHAUN

down there at the end of the board in her natty uniform of dark green and the saucy hat of her looped up on wan side—she ought to know. But did she? Father Francis, the fiery little Franciscan from Church Street—he said he knew. And Shaun hummed :

*I know and I know and I know said she,
I know what I know and the devil take ye.*

As Shaun the Watcher thought of little Father Francis living in a world of his own, talking every day with the saints and angels of God and indeed he a personal friend of Saint Brigid with her mantle of stars, one little eye closed completely.

Who knew anyhow whether there were saints and angels any more than that there were fairies and divileens? His ould mother at home told him there were and that she had once seen a saint in the grey dawn of the morning looking down on him, Shaun, and he lyin' dead and wasted, and there was no knowin'. But the Bernard Shaw who was the same as his God didn't say anything about that.

Anyhow he'd know by to-morrow when they'd all be in glory. Sure there was no chance for this bloody risin' anyhow. But the others were in it—and there you were. He wasn't goin' to turn back now for any blasted Englishman of them all.

Not that he believed that the Commandant there at the head of the board in Fraternity Hall,

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

for all his talk about scientific warfare and readin' up Connolly on trench diggin' and all, could lead a hen-coop much more the half hundred gathered there for the great adventure. . . .

"Now, this is your oath. . . . Will ye live and die for Ireland? . . . Take the book in your hand . . . if you wish to draw back now is your time. Ireland doesn't want any man who isn't willin' and sure of himself."

And then the answer :

"I will live and die for Ireland !"

"I will live and die for Ireland !" Musha ! there wouldn't be much livin'. Ireland didn't want her livin'—she only wanted her dead. But be cripes ! it would be grand to have the feelin' of the ould man-stopper against his cheek and the kick of the butt with the elephant bullet plunkin' into flesh and blood instead of against the hard targets up there in Croke Park. But bad scrams to him ! if little Shamus hadn't claimed the man-stopper and so he supposed he'd have to do wid his Mauser—but what was the good of those pencil bullets anyway ?

What was it that little man at the table now was sayin' :

"Maybe afther all I'd rather be goin' home to me wife and children. I'm not so sure about the dyin'."

Well, wasn't he the sensible man, anyhow ! Why, in God's name, couldn't he, Shaun, do the same and go back to his ould mother in Faddle Alley and live the makin's of a quiet and respect-

SHAUN

able existence? He, a chemical works' labourer by profession, but a poet by the grace of God. And write his little poetry and read Bernard Shaw and be happy . . . and marry.

"Marry." He looked at the grey-eyed woman there overright him. The woman with the calm grey eyes, so different from that fiery Amazon beyond her with the short flamin' hair and she wid her big magazine pistol strapped to her hips. Sure marriage wasn't for him or the likes of him. If Sheilah Shaw wouldn't be lookin' the right way at him, and sure, why should she be lookin' at him and he a labourer with twenty-eight shillin's a week, when he was in work—why, he'd live and die a virgin. She lookin' on him and he only twenty-five and with eyes burnt by the lime and she like wan of her beloved Sidhe—those fairy-gods of the starry eyes and the deep wisdom. God help him but were his senses goin'!

He came back to himself and to Ireland as he heard the crash of the chairs as they were pushed back and the high tense tones of the Commandant:

"Now boys, ye have it. Out down the steps, every man walkin' quietly—sure they'll only think it's a divarsion the same as always. Then you know your directions."

Down the steps streamed rebellion in the spring air. There was Eamon and Little Shamus and Big Shamus, and Kitty the Divil walkin' as brazen as brass with her big pistol and her lovely green uniform with the gold shamrock on the lapels.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

And there, sure enough, was little Father Francis, corded in his brown habit, lifting his small brown hands to bless them with the lovely Irish blessing, blessing rebellion. And now he was saying something in the Irish: *Er son Eireann agus er son Dé do bhiómair bailighthe!* Oh, that was true enough: "For the sake of Ireland and of God they were gathered."

At the sight of him, Shaun's heart leaped within him. Maybe they'd come well out of it after all. Wasn't England hemmed in on the West Front and the War on two years and wasn't all Ireland waiting to reel after them?

They struck the hard white road, the Commandant at the head with his eyes shining, Jasper Moriarty by his side, the small sweet mouth shut and lookin' like hell. And wasn't the Commandant himself singin'?

The words came to Shaun the Watcher at the rear of the column where he saw the Dubliners laughin' at them. Blast them! weren't they always laughin'? But there was the singin':

Forty men from Dublin Town—

Forty men from Dublin Town . . .

CHAPTER II

THE GULLY

SURE wasn't it fine to be walkin' along in the sunlight and the people lookin' at them and all. There was the Commandant at the head of them with his eyes alight and he dancin' in the road with the joy of it as he sang his "Forty Men."

Forty men. There were fifty at that, but soon he was goin' to be where there'd be less than a dozen. Nine men to stop the bloody British army, in the House near the Viaduct. For he had his orders.

Musha! but wasn't he the big *omadhaun* to be walkin' to his death in the sunlight and his ould mother back there in Faddle Alley and only the poorhouse for her after he was killed?

All Ireland waitin' to reel afther them. Well, those boucaleens on the sidewalk didn't look like reelin' afther anything but sthrong drink or weak women. Laughin' they were.

And who wouldn't be laughin' at half a hundred poor fools goin' to their deaths in the face of the British army—and for what?

For Ireland?

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Er son Eireann do bhiómair bailighthe. "For the sake of Ireland they were gathered."

Yes, there was Ireland always callin'—but death was always in her call. Death. Sure didn't she live on death?

But now the boys were risin' the tune: "Forty Men from Dublin Town," pealin' it out full-throated to the high sun with Jasper Moriarty lookin' as long as hell risin' it highest of them all, the red of his lips glistenin' in the sun—and for God's sake look at the curly black beard waggin' to the tune. Musha! but it was great to be goin' to their deaths afther all.

And now he was singin' it himself. Bad cess to it! it caught a man in the throat. "Forty Men from Dublin Town . . ."

And here was Big Shamus, the section commander, droppin' back to him bit by bit, letting the long line go past him with the short steps he tuk. And now he was level, and now he was saying something.

"Yes, of course he heard. Hadn't he his instructions?"

And little Shamus was fallin' back, too. And Tom and Jasper and Paudeen the Fool. And a strange ragged young man with a curly chestnut beard and an eye blue as a lake set in the hills, who had stepped off the pavement to join them, rags and all. A very quare young man.

They were letting the long column swing past and they standin' there clusterin' together on the white road like a lot of hens, with their ban-

THE GULLY

doliers catchin' them across the chest and the damn heavy Martinis over their shoulders—all but little Shamus, bad scramps to him wid no idea of discipline, draggin' his elephant gun at the trail and the gun as big as himself.

There was Shamus More with the short word of command and Moriarty by his side, still lookin' like hell, and there they were, a queer bunch entirely, swinging down towards the Viaduct over the railway where he used to sit to watch the trains when he was a gossoon no bigger than Shamus Beg.

Look at that big fellow on the pavement, wid the laugh on the side of his face, that threw the word as he stood lookin' at them—wouldn't he like to drive his teeth down his throat wid the butt of his gun! "Play-actors" indade.

Well, weren't they play-actors, too? Weren't they playin' at war?

They'd show him who was play-actin' before the night was out. By God! if there was goin' to be play-actin', the British army would know it.

That was the house. A tall high fellow with high starin' eyes that looked like the giant in the book he had when he was a child. A cruel lookin' place. And there was the Viaduct, with its parapets wide apart on the other side of the line and narrowing on this side to a gully, and the house standin' high over it all and commandin' the long straight road as far as the eye could stretch itself.

And Big Shamus knockin' at the door and all

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

as polite as you please. "An' would they kindly let them in? Ireland was in insurrection."

If he had his way, he'd smash in the bloody door. Sure wasn't it makin' a fool of themselves they were with that servant standin' there and tellin' them to go away and not make the crows laugh. Wouldn't it be the right thing to drive a bayonet into her belly there where the round of it showed itself under the white apron? Weren't they all like that in Dublin—a dirty fainthearted laughin' lot? A scornin' pack.

"An' she'd go in and see the masther" would she? And there was the masther himself. Surprised he was, was he, to hear that Ireland was risin'? He hadn't seen it in the papers. And "an Irish Republic." That seemed as quare to him as a Republic of Jerusalem—did it? And so they had better come in and he'd make them as comfortable as possible, would he?

That was always the way in Dublin. They laughed everything out of existence. They laughed at Ireland. They laughed at Europe. They laughed at one another. They laughed at life and they laughed at death. They believed nothin', the dirty, fainthearted, thievin' lot of skunks. God cripple them!

And there he was himself, wipin' his feet on the mat as though he had come to tea, and there was Big Shamus apologisin' for disturbin' the family. And there was Jasper Moriarty as lieutenant movin' around like a man wid a devil in him, the pale eyes with the little black centres

THE GULLY

movin' six ways at once. And there was little Shamus, truculent as hell, wid the scrub over his mouth bristlin', flingin' his German elephant-killer into the hatstand with a noise like the end of the world. But Shamus was the great fun entirely. If only the others had the sniff of the sniff of his spirit !

But all the same, the effect was destroyed entirely by that flag of distress stickin' out from behind. Didn't he use *sugauns* and paper and all to keep it in and tie things round his waist inside his breeches to cover it. But it was terrible to be a lone man widout a mother or a wife or childer or anything.

Here was the real thing anyhow at the long last. Here was Big Shamus tellin' the family not to be mindin' him but he had his work to do and Moriarty givin' out orders which nobody minded. And there he was draggin' the hall table and the heavy mahogany sideboard out of the big room on the right into the hall and puttin' them up against the British army.

This was the real thing.

Play-actors, indeed !

Wasn't it great to be sweatin' and shovin' there for Ireland.

Shamus More didn't expect the British army that night. The gossoon had tould him that the soldiers were restin' somewhere down there by the sea. But the telegraphs were goin' and the Morse beam flashin' backwards and forwards in the skies above them, and be sure it wouldn't be

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

long before the boys in khaki came pourin' over the Irish Sea—God blast them! But maybe they'd get a chance at a peeler.

Those bloody "peelers." They were the boys. If a peeler came up to the door, he'd be glad to open it and put a bullet into him just to break their luck. Hadn't his uncle been a peeler and himself the dirtiest blackguard in Ireland and didn't his uncle tell him often what a dirty lot they were and how he hated them? Oh! for a chance at a peeler. But the police knew how to keep out of harm's way . . . small blame to them.

Tom was to make the tea, was he? And he Shaun, was to go up to the first floor to help the section commander.

It was fine up here. A great place for a shootin' match. He could shoot the whole bloody British army from there. And hadn't he been practisin' for this? It was easier to hit flesh and blood than brick and plaster.

Here was a hell of a fine mattress to go against the window on the left. Well, the British army could fire their rifles into that until they were tired—they wouldn't hit wan of them. And there, now, were the shutters closed and a nice little spy-hole and all to shoot through. And below there, ever so far away, was the viaduct, lookin' so calm and peaceful in the afther-noon sun, and that strangulated gully where it narrowed.

But, the Lord deliver us! it was late. How

THE GULLY

the time went when you were busy with good work.

But there was Tom callin' up to them that the tea was ready. Tea was the stuff to keep your spirits up. Better than whiskey, which was only a whiplash for the moment. Better than brandy or even porter. But porter was the great drink after all.

He must go down.

Of course little Shamus was drinkin' his tea like a pirate in the lea of Shamus More with the moustachios of the big man hangin' over his little shrunken head. And Big Shamus—what did he want to look so serious for? Sure you could only die wance.

Well, there was the tea finished and the bread and butter and the night comin' on and still no sign of a peeler, much more a soldier. What was the good of puttin' Paudeen on guard in the room above? What was there to guard?

But this business of makin' up a shakedown on the floor had a touch of the real thing. That, and he mustn't take his clothes or boots off.

And now there was Shamus Beg in the corner kneelin' down and sayin' his prayers and tellin' his beads. And the other Shamus by his side. And Jasper standing by the mantelpiece and bitin' his nails until they bled. And Tom and Paudeen and all . . . and the Strange Young Man.

What was comin' over them at all at all that they were sayin' their prayers? Sure they weren't dead yet.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

All the same, there was no knowin'. Maybe it was as well to say a couple even though he, Shaun, was a rationalist and a follower of Bernard Shaw, who believed in nothing and in everything.

Shaun the Watcher fell on his knees with the rest and repeated the prayers of his Church—the prayers that held to him when so much was falling away. And after he had finished he read a little in “John Bull’s Other Island,” which he always carried with him and so lay to sleep like a little child on the pallet he had drawn on to the floor. He slept through that night and watched through the dawn of the next day into another day and all the following night, sleeping and waking and drinking tea, which is a spiritual drink.

CHAPTER III

“THEY THAT ENDURED . . .”

IT was the dawn of the third day as Shaun came to himself in the room of the house near the viaduct. He had to drag himself back to consciousness—always a hard business with him.

Sure wasn't that the grey dawn itself, comin' up over Dublin Town and the whole world at peace?

Out there, the sea, Kingstown-way.

Still with only the half of his soul in his body, he went over to the middle window to look out through the spy hole at the grey slate roofs of Dublin Town. There they stretched foreninst him, slate on slate and grey stone wall on grey stone wall and wallflowers on the top of them—oh the lovely velvety wallflowers!

And in between, in the middle distance, “No 77,” the house that might yet make history.

The peace of God lay over Dublin Town. Not a soul on the bare white road running down from the house towards the viaduct gully, with the shroud of the night slowly lifting away from it.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Bare and ghosty it looked in the grey light with the shadow of a white cat stealing across it :

*Ghosts, grey ghosts,
Stealin' out of the ranks of the Heavenly Host. . . .*

he murmured to himself in the way that he had, half singing, half speaking.

But never a man in khaki. Never a man in blue. Where in the name of God were all the peelers and sojers of Dublin Town ?

And out there, Kingstown-way, the sea.

There was Pauden stretched on the floor and snoring as though he were fighting somebody, with Jasper Moriarty by his side lying on his bed like a saint on the rack, his red lips parted and his cheeks with a pallor on them like a death sweat. And Big Shamus, his great mouth open, and he snorin' to the cold airs of the mornin' giving Pauden answer for answer. An' little Shamus coiled like an eel with the inevitable tail hangin' out behind. Oh the dirty little darlin' !

And the strange young man who had joined them on the pavement the day before.

But wasn't he the quare man, with his curling beard, a face like pasteboard and the two eyes burnin' in the head of him as he lay there in the corner, silently awake, and looking at Jasper with his burning eyes and tender smile.

But out there the dawn ever growing stronger and the sea and Kingstown-way. England's sea.

“THEY THAT ENDURED . . .”

The blue sea and the grey dawn. The blue sea out of which *they* were to come.

Ah but wasn't that the great silence and all the souls in the world asleep :

*Souls that are sleeping and hearts that are weeping,
But never a sigh from the heart of the sea.*

There is somethin' beatin' out there like the beat of a heart. He listened to his own heart beating strongly and the other beat that came like an echo. Pit-pat. Pit-pat.

Christ in heaven ! They're comin'.

Is it himself that is screamin' and are those grey ghosts that are risin' from their pallets risin' to the call ?

Pit-a-pat. Pit-a-pat.

Then he sees them.

Queer little figures moving like marionettes up the length of the white road—one-two—one-two—as though there were strings pullin' them to their work.

Why couldn't Shamus More let him alone even though he was the Section Commandant itself ? Sure didn't he know his work ? Didn't he know as well as Shamus that if they let the British Army pass the Viaduct, the Risin' was done ? Of course he'd let the bloody Tommies come up and into the gully of the viaduct before he tuk the rifle the right way in his hands . . . and wasn't there “77 ?” Didn't he see the two Martini rifles and the Mausers with the fine

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

needle bullets that could carry through half a dozen men—and hadn't little Shamus the elephant gun—a great man-stopper entirely even though his wouldn't be the hand on the trigger? Sure, didn't he know his business?

Pit-pat—pit-pat. One-two—one-two.

There were the officers spotless in khaki with their leggin's shinin' in the sun now rising and their field glasses and their little footly maps—and all the conthraptions of war, God damn them!

And behind them again, another of their platoons or whatever they called them, all moving to the one-two—one-two.

Clean-faced boys they were, even though they were English. Decent boys with pink faces only doin' their duty . . . innocents, an' they about to loose hell into them and all.

Wasn't there a couple of thousand of them? But there'd be good shootin' anyhow.

Well, here was his gun at the ready and he'd let them have it in a minute.

But, damn them! if they weren't lyin' on the ground. Why couldn't they come and be killed like decent men? And now, may God forgive him! but there, through the glass of Big Shamus, he could see wan of them eatin' apples or something out of a paper bag and two more lightin' up their fags. Maybe they thought they were play-actin'.

Play-actin'. They'd give them play-actin'.

And here comes a sort of flyin' column that crawls on its own shadow. Faith 'tis they that

“THEY THAT ENDURED . . .”

are cautious as they pass the big house at the junction of the three roads. 'Tis frightened they are of the big house where they think that hell is waitin' for them—and hell before them all the time in “77.”

May he never ! if they haven't thrown out a line of flankers as though they were trailin' Red Indians, who come stoopin' up the footpaths with behind them the little groups of men who lie down on the road as though they had learned it all out of a book. Just like manoeuvres, only more so.

Oh, how cautious they are and all so safe and silent. And they wid their bayonets held stiff as pokers foreninst them.

Well, be God ! he could hit that front fellow in the shest if Shamus only'd let him. He has him covered fair and square. Just to see the bullet go home and the red blood spurt out.

There is the crack of a whip and a red flash from No. “77.” Then another and another.

Be Christ ! they've got it !

They're runnin' back down the road like hares, the dirty cowards.

Oh, but they don't like to feel the leaden flail on their backs. An' Ireland is risin'. Didn't they have the news last night from the Com-mandant ? Sure wouldn't the Dublin people come out afther all when they heard the guns ?

What was that Moriarty was sayin' behind him ? “ For God's sake, boys, to keep cool and to keep firin'.” What did he think they'd do ?

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Sure he knew they were in action. Why couldn't he hould his whisht ?

Well indeed he knew what they had to do. They had to hold the Gully against the British army for two days to prevent reinforcements to the Postoffice and to give Ireland time to rise. That was all.

If they held it, wouldn't it be the great story for his children and for their children, too ? And if they didn't hold it wouldn't it be a still greater story ? And even if Ireland didn't rise, wasn't it the great fight ?

England's army wouldn't have any bloody picnic anyhow.

Lying there on his belly with the muzzle of his gun poking through the shutter, couldn't he see the flashes of the guns from "77 ?" That was where two men were tryin' to stop an army. He wished he was in "77." Would their turn never come to let the bleedin' swine have it ?

The whips had stopped crackin' now. Another of those terrible silences. How he hated them ! What was that they were sayin' out there ? Sure wasn't it like a voice out of a phonograph coming from an immense distance ?

"Fix bayonets ! Charge !"

Let them charge and be damned to them ! Weren't they waitin' for them ? Wasn't it for this they had been shootin' at the butts and studyin' tactics ?

Here they come at last ! a great brown wave with the bayonets glittering in front of it, like

“THEY THAT ENDURED . . .”

the spume on a freshet and a little ahead the funny little officers with their drawn swords and everything like he had seen it in the picture in Faddle Alley, that time his father had cut it out of the “Illustrated London News.”

There was a fine target for you. You couldn't miss it in a thousand years. And his hand as steady as the steel. He would just squeeze a little on the trigger to be ready.

Something had kicked him on the shoulder and there was a smack under his ear. What was it that had sthruck him?

Something had happened to the front of the khaki column.

It was breaking like glass and still from under his ear came the thrash of some great whip.

It was he that had the great joy—sure it was he that had fired the gun and broken the column. It wasn't a whip at all but the magazine of his own gun and the friendly butt and all.

Those two fellows in front won't get on their feet again in a hurry for all their jerks—and the boyo beyond them drivin' his head into the road.

Now the little tin officers are shoutin' and doin' something and now, down there on the white road flecked with the dark patches, glory be! they are runnin' for their lives.

Nine Irishmen against the bloody British Army. Wait until Dublin comes out. Maybe there were men now on their way to them. Ireland a nation! Ireland! Ireland! Well you couldn't bate the Irish afther all.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

That day's work was over.

He might be able to rest a bit, for he was tired with the shoutin' and the beatin' of his heart and everything.

His eye wandered to where Moriarty was lying there on his side at the left window, the sweat and blood pouring down his face to change it into a grimy mask—but the blue-black hair still lying smooth to the high narrow head. He was breathing hard and there was blood in his eye as he still looked along the line of the big elephant gun which he had taken from the hands of little Shamus, who, just before, had gone downstairs to fetch some water in a house from which everybody had fled. He knew it was Jasper Moriarty who by sheer certainty of aim had broken that last rush—he the man who could strike a pipe out of a man's mouth at fifty yards.

There was not a man in Ireland who hated the English garrison with the black hate of Jasper Moriarty—he knew that, and as he looked at him he felt a momentary surging towards him. After all, Jasper was a great man. . . .

What was that? He was sayin' something about going to "77" and his eyes flickering. Was he mad or what was he?

But Jasper Moriarty had left his gun lying there and had gone out of the room.

The warm upsurging towards Jasper had subsided and Shaun the Watcher felt something cold stealing into him.

“THEY THAT ENDURED . . .”

That was always the way with Jasper Moriarty. When ye wanted to love him ye couldn't.

“Fix bayonets! Charge!”

Out of the far distance came the voice of the little phonograph man.

So the British army hadn't got its bellyful yet. Well, there was more work to be done. That's all there was about it.

Here they come up the road scuttering like driven cattle, their hoofs beating the hard road and the little officer in front with blood in his face. Let them have it again in God's name.

The lash from “77” is crackin' again.

Christ! but how they fall and kick in the grey dust as they feel the flail. Now wan of them is lyin' on his face kickin' in the roadway and the big fat fellow by his side clutching at his belly and screamin' like the hare he had shot that day long ago in the Mourne mountains. Cripes! how they run!

And now the Hall on the right has given them *nabocklish*. God rain down blessins' on the boys in there that he had forgotten! Now they are finished. Some of them are runnin' back like jack rabbits. Oh! but that was the great shot—and didn't he jump in the air like a boundin' bucko as he felt the lead!

There is the grey road and there are the black patches spreadin' from the sport of their guns. He knew who had the big patch—the man shot in the shest with the man-killer by little Shamus there at the window on his left, with his scrub

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

of moustache and he breathin' fire and brimstone an spittin' tin tacks and boastin' what he wouldn't do.

But there was that silence again. A murderous silence entirely.

Glory be ! Who was that walking out from the house on the left down there with a towel on her arm and a jug of something in her hand ?

The grey woman.

Wasn't it lovely lookin' at her and she mendin up what the guns had done ? An' she movin' like a woman in a sick room. Wasn't it the quare woman that Sheilah was—she the woman whose ancestors were English and who hated the English as only an Irishwoman with English blood in her veins could, and here she was bindin' up their wounds.

Hadn't she done that once before—the day they ran the guns from Howth ? “ All wounded men look the same to me,” she had said.

Well, he wouldn't do it. God damn them ! he'd let them lie in their clay. But then, she was Sheilah, the woman without mercy but with the great pity.

How hot he was with sweat and dirt ! And the hot heart pumpin' in him and the love in his throat stranglin' him.

Could he and the couple of boys by the side of him have made all that bloody mess ? How could they ? An' she bindin' up the wounds—she the woman that he loved, bindin' up the wounds of those that were out to kill him, Shaun

“THEY THAT ENDURED . . .”

Brophy, and his comrades. Wasn't it the quare world?

And now she has walked back. What is that?

A mass of men rushin' round the corner of a side street and up the viaduct. There is the smash of the man-stopper from the window at his left and that fellow has it—the fellow who threw up his hands to fall back into the canal. But who is that big divil that looks like a sergeant runnin' to the front with glory and death treadin' on his heels, his back to him and his arms working like flails as he calls to his men?

“Come on, come on, you bastards!”

He sees glory waitin', does he? He won't be waitin' long for he has his back covered down near the kidneys.

A great shot. Down he goes in his clay.

Death is down there shrieking back and forth across the viaduct, and now, glory be to God! is he mad or is it that they are all mad? For there are half a dozen women walkin' to and fro between the shriekin' death as solemn as nurses, and now wan of them is tearin' her apron into strips.

It is Sheilah.

Now she has passed the Gully and is makin' her way up to the house. Oh! but she will be killed. Nothing can save her but God—and just now God is very far away.

And here she is, walkin', walkin'.

“For God's sake, Sheilah darlin', keep back!”

He could have sworn that the voice was that of Jasper Moriarty. But Moriarty had gone to

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

“77.” Yet he thought he saw a figure spring up from the near window and rush out of the door through the smoke. Was it his own voice or another’s?

And now she is lookin’ up at where the voice came from—the woman with the grey eyes lookin’ up to see nothing but the muzzles of the guns . . . and she smiles, a strange tender smile like a mother smilin’ to a child.

But to whom was she smilin’?

Now, God damn them! they have thrashed their way up to where the viaduct’s throttle shows itself—right into the gully. There they come with the sweat and blood dripping from gory masks driven to their work by their officers.

Christ! he cannot load fast enough. They shall not pass the Gully—and the Mauser burnin’ him. They shall not pass the Gully. All things slip away from him. There is no earth and no heaven. There is only the Gully. The Gully. Oh! my God! the Gully.

Blast it! his rifle is red hot. It has jammed in his hand. They must not pass the Gully.

But there is Moriarty by his side firin’ away and lookin’ like a thing on the red hearthstone of hell. Then he hadn’t gone to “77” afther all.

Hell to his sowl! but it is great to fire into the brown of them with the rifle red hot in his hands but workin’ again. Smack—smack—smack and the leaden flail is flailin’ them to hell. Tear them! Tear them! Fire at the bloody swine. Fire!

“THEY THAT ENDURED . . .”

They have broken again. They are flying.

“Play-actin’ ” indeed.

Praises be ! for the silence this time. That was the last of them. The British army had got its bellyful.

And there was the silence of God once more about them and only the grey road before, and the things lyin’ on it. . . .

What is that ? What is that crackling in the distance ? The shutter is breaking over his head. What is that ?

Christ ! what is that ?

It isn’t a whip but a thousand whips that are crackin’ around them. What is it that is tearin’ the curtain over his head like the claws of demon cats and shattering the great chandeliers and mirrors in the room behind him ?

And now there is a hoarser note. Something is spurting lead into the house. A machine gun. Then it was not the last, after all.

The cowards ! They fear to come close. They mean to do their work at a distance.

And there is a great bell tollin’ for them foreinist the house and there are harps playin’ behind him, playin’ them in to glory. Is it in glory he is and he not knowin’ it ?

But, sure, now he has it. It is only the lead as it flicks the chords of the piano like a great Æolian harp and the bullets as they strike the electric standard before the house.

And now, another lull. The clock behind him

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

as he turns strikes the half hour. It is half eight of the clock.

But why doesn't Big Shamus go on firin' ? He seems to be tired, lyin' there on the chair.

Shamus ! Shamus ! Fire, for God's sake, fire !

What is the matter with him ? Why doesn't he move. And there he is lookin' indifferent before him, his rifle to his cheek and never a hand to the bandolier full of bullets at his side. And Moriarty has disappeared.

He must crawl over to him. Another leaden gust shakes and shivers over his head. Shamus More ! Why don't you fire ?

But Big Shamus will never fire his rifle again, and little Shamus cracked, there by the side of him, that he throws down his gun and flings himself on his friend with the dry sobs tearin' at him and he with his arms around the big man's neck ! And now he is carryin' him out through the door—he a dead man and work to be done.

But Paudeen has run down from above and is firin', thank the Saints ! As he looks, he sees him lift himself a little on his belly and fall forward. Is it that he is dead ? Sure they're all dead.

Christ ! if those above at the upper windows will only come down. He can't bear it any more—and he alone.

He turns to see the strange young man with the burning eyes standing behind them, living and dead, and looking at them, and he with the

“THEY THAT ENDURED . . .”

strange far smile in the eyes of him, and so he cries to him to take up the gun for there is work to be done . . . and he still only smilin' at him. And now the smoke has rolled over him and when it has passed he has disappeared.

And now there is the great roaring behind him as the water-pipes burst and the hiss of the steam like a cage of angry serpents as the water meets the fire and the flames lickin' down to eat up what is left of them and the shuttered window over his head flying open in the leaden blast.

He must get out of the trap.

Down the stairs he goes to find little Shamus by his side as he reaches the hall door. But who can shift that furniture and the lead waitin' for them before the house? Up the stairs again and the fire and water pourin' down on them.

Another blast of lead a-shrieking and they runnin' round and round the trap and the fire tormentin' them. What is that little Shamus is screamin'? A skylight in the roof and a waterpipe. Well, up wid them in God's name.

Up to the top floor and there is the ladder leadin' to the attic. Now they are crouching under the roof slates and there, praises be! is the skylight, hidden from the soldiers on the back roof slope and there is the gutter and the pipe with them hanging over it. A hell of a drop, but it's got to be faced. . . . What's that Shamus is sayin' now again?

“He's goin' back for Big Shamus!”

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Is he, be Christ ! and Big Shamus dead as yesterday.

There he goes back up the roof and down through the skylight the cracked blackguard. He could flay the hide off him ! So up the roof wid himself agin'—he can't leave that sheveragh alone to bring up his dead. Here is a hould for the fingers where the slates are broken and now he is looking down over the edge of the skylight into the volcano of the house. And no Shamus.

Hell's alive ! but what's that ? That rumble and thunder from inside the fiery shell—and now the floors are droppin' down into the flamin' pit and little Shamus gone for ever ?

Every wan for himself, now. And so down the roof and it trembling under him, and, thank God ! here's the waterpipe—so over the edge now, Shaun boy, and a monkey down the pipe with death treadin' on the tail of your coat behind.

CHAPTER IV

A MORNING AT THE McCONKEYS

MRS. McCONKEY sat in her chair at the end of the long table in the gracious Dublin drawing-room, and Mr. McConkey sat in his chair at the other end. Between them, on either side, shut in, the two lines of nurses, stiff and starched, with, on the left of her mother and her only child, a lady of forty-five with the face of a thoroughbred horse with her inexorable eye, high narrow forehead, and pinched nostrils. "Miss Cynthia," as she was always known to the nurses, was a widow whose husband it was reputed had run away from her on his wedding night and had never since been seen.

The FitzWilliam House maternity home in Stephen's Green, looking out over the ducks on the ornamental water, was a little Ireland in itself, with a "North" and "South," Protestant and Catholic, frozen to its icy board. Mrs. McConkey, with the face of a virgin and eyes like chilled steel, ruled her nurses as she ruled her flowers. She clipped them and trained them—but she did not fertilise them. She gave them

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

the minimum of sustenance, physical and spiritual, but she demanded from them her full meed of return and something over. With the white muslin that wrapped her slender throat about over her close-fitting black dress, one looked for the wimple above.

The God of Mrs. McConkey was the God of her husband and daughter, that daughter who was the dragon of FitzWilliam House and the solitary product of a frosty bed. He was a jealous God, and, truth to tell, a malignant God—and his name was Jehovah. But, above all, he was a Protestant God. He hated Catholics.

At the top of the table and at the bottom there was fish for Mrs. and Miss McConkey and bacon and eggs for Mr. McConkey. In between, there was genteel starvation with a strictly rationed bread and butter and plenty of cloying sweet stuffs. "But," as nurse Donovan said, "nobody could deny that the tea was good and strong, thank God!"

Mr. McConkey, who, thirty years before, had retired, first upon his wife and then upon his daughter with a genteel lumbago, sat with his crutches on either side of his chair reading from "The Irish Times" and the rival paper alternately, not so much because he wished to see both sides of the question, but because he could pick out the more inflammatory items from the Nationalist organ and then strike fire from them by throwing at them the flintier portions of the conservative "Times." He read to his wife and

A MORNING AT THE McCONKEYS

daughter but *at* the nurses, who sat with looks of sullen hate or uneasy smiling, except nurse McTavish from Belfast, a little fierce, freckled creature of sandy complexion and sandier temperament, who blinked approbation at the more poisonous passages.

Not indeed that she liked the McConkeys—but weren't they her own breed—the true blue Orange breed, and even though Mr. McConkey himself wasn't a real Ulsterman, though born in the "right" part of Tyrone, he'd lived in the South so long and he with the Southern accent. And sure it was what them "Cattys" deserved.

"Heh-heh-heh!" It wheezed in the high dry laugh of the old gentleman with the flowing white moustache, the imposing high bald forehead and rather empty eyes from where he sat enthroned rather like a great pink baby. "And do ye read this?"

"Faith they're going to shoot the lot of them and a good thing, too! 'Tis a shame that 'Sniper' blackguard, Jasper Moriarty, has escaped. Shootin's too good for the likes of them.

"Ireland in rebellion indeed! If I'd my way, I'd take Padraic Pearse and Shaun the Watcher and all those gentry—aye, and Miss Sheilah Shaw and all her dirty rebel friends and I'd sthrrip them to the waist and beat them through the streets of Dublin . . . and shoot them afterwards."

His wife bit her thin lips tightly until every drop of blood had been bitten out of them, but said nothing.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Nurse Donovan cut her thick white bread through with great deliberation as the blood mounted to her cheeks.

"Sheilah Shaw indeed and Shaun! Ha—ha! A nice pair. Shaun the common labourer." The laugh came out strangled from behind the curtain of the big white moustache.

"Hsh," said his wife, warningly, and pointed up through the ceiling.

"Well, Chrissy, and it isn't my fault if she's up there itself with her friend, Mrs. O'Rourke, and her time on her and all. Wasn't her father a good Unionist and a good Protestant and she taking the dirty rebel way? And didn't that low blackguard, Shaun the Watcher as they call him, come round here every day to see her when she was stayin' in the house waitin' for that other friend of hers that was here before to have her child, pretendin' now this and now that and maybe he watchin' the officers that come to see their wives? And isn't it disgraced that we are with a general's wife and all in the front room?"

"We don't want any politics at the table, father." Miss Cynthis was looking the length of the nurses, who were stirring uneasily. "But I must say," she went on, "although I know nothing about politics, that I hope they'll give Shaun what's coming to him—he and the rest of them, preventing decent citizens from earning their bread with their shootings and goings on."

"Boiling oil," said Mrs. McConkey tersely and opening her thin, virginal lips for the first

A MORNING AT THE McCONKEYS

time. "A touch of Cromwell. That's what they want." And the beautiful grey eyes opened slightly in the implacable Madonna face.

"Listen to this, now," read Mr. McConkey :

I am satisfied I have done my duty to my beloved Ireland. I must now prepare. The last few hours must be spent with God alone. . . .

That's Mallin, the silk weaver talkin', makin' his last speech in Mountjoy before they shoot the rebellion out of him. All talk. All for the papers. Oh, the dirty hypocrite ! Listen again :

But oh ! if only you and the little ones were coming too, we could all reach heaven together.

. . . I would like you to dedicate Una to the service of God and also Joseph. . . . Una, my little one, be a nun. Joseph, my little man, be a priest if you can. . . .

Mr. McConkey broke off with a sort of stifled howl. The smooth dignity of the high white forehead was wrinkled by fine lines like the skin of a crying baby.

"There ye have it now ! Priests and nuns. Jesuits ! That's what's at the back of the Risin'. But never mind, let me go on :

Good-bye, my wife, my darling. My heart-strings are torn . . . ("Heh—heh—heh !") when I think of you and the children, of our manly

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

James, happy-go-lucky John, shy, warm Una, Daddy's girl, little Joseph, my little man, my little man. I cannot keep the tears back when I think of him ; he will rest in my arms no more . . . Joseph, my little man, my little man. . . .

There ye have the dirty hypocrites. All talk. All for the papers."

With a final derisive wheeze, Mr. McConkey put down the paper.

"That is not true, Mr. McConkey." It was the little dark nurse at the end of the table, speaking.

"What is not true, nurse Donovan, if I may ask it ?"

But here, Miss Cynthis thrust her horse-face forwards and said, decisively : "No more politics now, papa."

Mrs. McConkey wiped her thin lips on one corner of her serviette with a quite extraordinary economy of effort and linen.

It was the tactic at which the nurses always grumbled. Each morning Mr. McConkey would read out some galling notice, and then Mrs. McConkey and Miss Cynthia would interfere to save him from retort by saying : "No more politics."

Mr. McConkey, disgusted, but afraid of his wife, and satisfied that he had done his work, swallowed the last drop of tea out of the big white cup with the gold shamrock on it, smacked his lips, pulled his two crutches from under his

A MORNING AT THE McCONKEYS

chair, and hobbled over to the big armchair by the open fire, for all that it was May.

The nurses got up from the table like children freed from school.

“Did ye hear that, Kathleen?” asked a little carrotty-haired nurse of her friend Kathleen as they went up the stairs, stopping for a moment on the landing to snatch some apples and scones left over on a patient’s tray and to eat them hurriedly.

“Did ye ever hear the like?” replied Kathleen, a great slob of a woman with a round soft face and a back like an elephant’s.

“’Tis easily seen they come from the Black North, and Miss Cynthia herself saying to that ould rip, her mother, the day I was tidyin’ behind the screen, that rebel money was as good as any other. Not that nurse Donovan need be puttin’ her oar in—givin’ herself airs because she has a boy ‘on the run.’ ’Tis little her man suffered by the side of mine for all her talk.”

The little carrotty-headed woman went on: “Sure wasn’t he half dead and not knowin’ me when I went to see him in Mountjoy, in delirium after the ‘G’s’ caught him when he was ‘on the run.’ When did her boy go through the likes of that?”

“True enough for ye, Biddy girl.

“Well ’tis grand to suffer for Ireland . . . but I must be goin’ up to that ould divil on the second. She’s in her last pains and howlin’ like

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

a cat. The fuss that some of them make about it!" said Kathleen.

"Ah, wait till ye get a dose of it yerself, Kathleen." The other laughed. "But there's something ye have to go through before ye come to the child-bed. First the pleasure, then the pain. But 'tis the woman that always pays."

The other blushed and laughed again. Wasn't it queer the way that Biddy would be talkin'—so free and bold. Indeed, it wasn't quite right . . . but she was very funny all the same. And there was the knock on the door—that rat-a-tat-a-tat of that lovely boy, Brian O'Rourke. 'Brian Boru' they did be callin' him. Wasn't it he that had the nerve to be comin' to visit the red-haired woman upstairs and every peeler in Dublin after him! Wasn't he the great fun!

The door had closed with a crash that shook the house and the nerves of every expectant mother in it. Up the stairs, like a water-spate, came a tall dark young man with a tremendous pair of shoulders, one great curl of hair running down across his forehead and his dark eyes alight.

"Ah, Kathleen, how are ye? Keep your eye on the back. I have a man in front." He threw it at her as he passed three steps at a time and into the room on the first front where his wife was with Sheilah Shaw.

Kathleen moved quickly to the window that looked out on the long old-world garden cradled within its walls of grey stone on which the wall-flowers and the dragonflowers grew, and it was

A MORNING AT THE McCONKEYS

astonishing to see so big and soft a woman move so quickly. . . . "You never knew. Them 'G' division men were everywhere. The dirty traitors, Irishmen as they were and drawn from the ranks of the Dublin Metropolitan Police to be put into plain clothes to spy on their countrymen."

Nurse Kathleen went quickly down the stairs as though to the telephone in the hall. But glancing round, she put down the receiver to go to the heavily-ironed front door and to open it. It was really astonishing how fast she moved.

Sure enough, there was the red-eyed man on the other side of the way, watching the house, with one shoulder twisted up to his ear and leaning on an adventitious crutch to beg from the passers by—young Brian's "shadow."

Around him the young children played, a red-headed little devil with a pair of malignant green eyes holding the split half of a toy pistol at the beggarman's head and screaming "Hands up!" as he threatened him. "God damn yer sowl but hold your hands up or have yer brains shot out!"

Up went the hands, with the mouth wrinkled into the queer whimsy of a smile and the red-rimmed eyes moving sightlessly around the circle of his tormentors.

Young Ireland was learning its lesson.

It was Shaun the Watcher.

PART II

The Growing

CHAPTER V

“BRIAN BORU”

UP in the first floor front, Brian O'Rourke, or “Brian Boru” as all Ireland knew him, stood looking down at his wife in the long chair, heavy with child, her deep red hair lying a little dank for all its curling strands on her white cheeks and a light sweat on her forehead glistening in the soft summerlight as it filtered through the curtains.

Moirá O'Rourke was a very young girl, not long out of her teens, with a large luminous eye of golden-brown and a figure like that of a boy. There was, indeed, something very boyish about her, even now in the moment of her agony.

By her side stood Sheilah Shaw, the grey-eyed woman, tall and shadowy as one of her own *Sidhe*—like one of those fairy gods painted by the mystic and dreamer who called himself “Sephiriél,” on the walls of the office where he placed his dreams in chains and bound his feet to solid earth—beings not quite of this world and yet not quite of the other, people of the Middle Kingdom. Her white slender hands twined and untwined themselves before her as she stood

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

looking down at Moira O'Rourke with that kindly detachment from all things earthly.

"And how is it with ye, Moira?" asked her husband.

"Oh Brian! how do I know how it is with me. And the police after you . . . and it my first. Only for Sheilah here I would be dead long ago. Doesn't she sleep over there on the stretcher-bed to be near me."

Sheilah smiled and bent down over her a little as though in blessing. But she said nothing.

"Haven't I Shaun outside dressed as a beggarman and he doin' all that's necessary. I tell ye, there's no one afther me now and he wid two of the best strapped under the seat of his breeches." The words rolled melliflously from his lips.

"Oh Brian! I am tired and frightened of all this talkin' about shooting. Many of the young boys are in it only for the sport. Sure 'tis little they know about dyin' for Ireland and all."

"What does that matter," put in Sheilah, "so long as the drive is there? Some of them know it, and some of them don't, but the only thing they have to give for Ireland is their lives and that is a blessing for them and a pride. Don't be stoppin' the boys."

"I won't be stoppin' the boys when they know for what it is they're dyin', and I won't grudge their dyin' if it is for an Irish Republic and not for freedom with a shackle to it. Oh Brian!" and she turned her big golden eyes on her hus-

“ BRIAN BORU ”

band, “swear that you’ll never go back on the Republic—swear it !”

There was something terrible in the wildness of her expression as even, in that hour and her time upon her, she thought of Ireland and the Republic—the dream for which so many had laid down their lives.

“ I swear it by the Almighty God and by the child that’s comin’,” said Brian, solemnly.

The woman in the chair groaned and sank a little together in her chair. Her husband lifted her a little in the chair as she clung to him.

“ Let me walk up and down a little, Brian,” she whispered, her face a sick white. “ My time is nearly with me.”

Up and down the long Dublin drawing-room, which a hundred years ago with its high white marble mantelpiece and sconces had seen many a gay rout, walked man and wife, she with her arm through his and swaying as she went, as though she carried the world.

But Sheilah had gone over to the window to look out at the man with the twisted shoulder on the other side of the road, as he called down the blessings of heaven upon the passers-by as he asked for alms, walking first one way and then the other, his eyes searching the street blindly from end to end. But every now and then he would turn as by accident to the house before him as though he would search her out behind the curtains.

What was this joking talk of Moira about

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Shaun the Watcher being in love with her—he a boy of 25 and she the grown woman who had never loved anything but Ireland—and one other thing?

All the same, Shaun was a great boy with a great love for Ireland. Maybe he was one of the tiny conscious minority who knew for what they were dyin'. But it was few enough of them there were.

The grey woman looked at that strange figure over there on the other side of the road, with a new interest, and the chastity of the face relaxed a little as she saw the thin frame broken by hard work and the eyes for all their keenness destroyed. There came to her in that moment the indomitable soul of the boy who was a chemical works' labourer by need, but who was a poet by the grace of Mary, and she almost loved him—she the woman who they said could never love anything of flesh and blood. 'Twas little they knew!

She went out into the passage and down the stairs into the hall so that Brian and Moira could talk to each other. From where she stood, she could see down the length of the hall into the "Cubby Hole"—the little surgery with the white enamelled tins boiling over the gas-flames with the shining instruments in them—the glittering steel for cutting into yielding flesh and warm blood, and the blood-stained water-proofs that always seemed to be haunting the big table down there. Well, Mrs. Olivier up above was expecting it any moment and also

“ BRIAN BORU ”

General O'Banion's wife downstairs—a nasty cold domineering Dubliner she was with an ascendancy accent, one of the Castle people. She was raising hell as usual. She and her pains.

But it was a queer thing, this mystery of birth. She thinkin' of it—she who would never have a man for lover—she who had always been cold to all men—and her mind ran to the boy before the house. She who loved her *Sidhe* and her books and poetry better than any man-folk of them all . . . save one. And what was marriage after all? A little pleasure and much pain . . . and for what? To give new life to an Ireland that was dyin' and that never could be resurrected for all their risin's and brave words.

Ah, but there was one man shut off from her as he was by the thing that was stronger than bolts and bars or life and death, to whom she would not have been cold—and he dyin' for a smile from her this ten years. She could have been warm to him and given him all that a woman had to give were it not for Ireland. Ireland, that asked for nothing less than all—that lived on tears and sorrow as others lived on joy. Ireland, the siren that sucked all life and joy from those who loved her.

She went back up the stairs and paused irresolutely on the landing outside the door of the O'Rourkes' room.

From where she stood, she looked the length of the stairs to see ascending through the sunlight that fell across it in golden bars a young girl

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

with the eyes of a fawn, her brown hair braided richly and smoothly around her fair young head. She was dressed in some simple grey stiff, all in one piece, and as the light fell into the eyes of deep misty blue, Sheilah thought of the Annunciation.

The girl moved slenderly up the stairs as though by some volition not her own, and then she had seen the woman at the top and had stopped a moment, and so had come up to her to kiss her on the lips.

"I've been downstairs to see Mrs. Hickey and now I've come up to see Moira," she said. "How is it with her?"

"It is all right, Honora. And we'll be goin' in in a minute after she has spoken with her husband, who is in there with her now."

The tall girl sat down on the top step and folded her hands between her knees. She sat there like a statue of her favourite Saint Brigid, it seemed to Sheilah, looking at her, and as she looked down from behind her, she wondered.

It seemed to her that she sat like a woman in a dream waiting to be awakened and then, without interval, it came to her that the awakening might be dangerous—for behind those misty eyes there was something starry, implacable.

Honora Moriarty, it always seemed to her, moved through life like some being of another world—a saint or angel who had no concern with this. Unlike her brother Jasper, she took no interest in politics and devoted most of her time

“ BRIAN BORU ”

to her religious duties. Ireland to her was so much a part of her being and of her faith that it ceased to be Ireland—and because it became all, ceased to be anything.

And then, as Sheilah well remembered, there had come one of those things that no one could understand.

There had been talk about Honora taking the veil, until she met Sergeant Michael MacGuire, “ Black Michael ” as the name was put on him, with his great moustache and dark blue eye—Michael MacGuire that was the biggest and the handsomest man in Ireland, to the thinkin’ of some, with his way and his eye. Some said that Honora and he were engaged and some said they weren’t—but however might be the way of it, there was no more talk about Honora going into a convent.

And he a Castle man and all, with the queer stories about him—that Dublin Castle that crouched like a louse on Ireland.

And more said that she and Jasper had quarrelled about the sergeant. Jasper adored Honora and was as jealous of her as though she were his sweetheart instead of his only sister, and they brought up together.

That was Ireland. Everybody in the wrong place and everything upside down.

But here was nurse Donovan coming up the stairs with her finger on her lips.

“ Good mornin’, Honora. Oh that’s you, is it, Miss Shaw? I was readin’ one of

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

your lovely poems in 'Banba.' It made me cry."

"Which of them was it, Bride?"

"Arrah I think I forget it. It was about 'The Quenchless Flame' or somethin'."

"Are ye sure ye read it, really, Bride?"

"Of course I did."

"But did ye understand it?" Sheilah was smiling sweetly at her.

"Oh, indeed an' I did when I read it, but I've forgotten it now. 'Tis the bad memory I always had. Here comes Miss McCann up the stairs. But 'tis she is the lovely pote."

A woman, her head a little on one side, was coming up the stairs with a mouth which twisted itself up towards one ear as she smiled to herself. There was, indeed, something twisted about the whole woman, who might have been thirty or might have been forty and who, one could see, had looked the same any time this ten years.

There was something hawk-like in the piercing grey-blue eyes and the nose rather large and hooked and a little on one side. It was a face that might have been that of a man, but there was no lower face to speak of, for the mouth and jaw were weak.

There was something mad about this girl—something "cracked," only that nobody would call her mad in a country where there were thousands of her like.

Maggie McCann had not always lived in Ire-

“ BRIAN BORU ”

land. She had been the daughter of a prosperous wine and spirit merchant in a little town of the County Wexford, a man who had met with reverses, that is, with the drink, and so Maggie had been forced to go out into the great world to earn her living and, if God willed it, to broaden her mind. But God did not will it.

She had been in America as a governess, but because it was congenitally impossible for her to live more than a month in any house without quarrelling with everybody, she had returned to Ireland, where she passed from house to house, always carrying that consuming flame that seemed to burn her up body and soul—the flame of Ireland—and with it, the cravings of suppressed motherhood. From family to family she drifted, singing her songs of freedom—that is, the doggerels which she called verse and composed by herself, her heart filled with bitterness and with love, the things that lie so close together in Ireland.

This was the woman, or girl, as she would be called in Ireland where nothing grows old, and as she called herself, who was coming up the stairs as Sheilah Shaw and nurse Donovan were speaking together.

“ Good morning, Miss Shaw. How is Moira this morning ? ”

“ She’s doing what she can and waiting her time, Miss McCann,” said Sheilah. “ But nobody can hurry God.”

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"I'm goin' in now to take her some buttermilk and a piece of brown bread and butter, Miss McCann," said the nurse. "Let you come in with me."

They all went into the room together.

"Good morning, Mr. O'Rourke," said Maggie McCann in that sweet singing voice, her head still a little on one side. And then she went over and kissed Moira O'Rourke tenderly, for a moment surprised into the motherhood she would never know.

"How are you, Maggie?" asked Mrs. O'Rourke. "Sure haven't I just been reading one of your poems in the 'Sniper' by the side of Sheilah's there."

"I hope you liked it? It came to me after one of me visitations—a visitation of Saint Francis." There was something eager, almost painful, in the careless, laughing enquiry.

"It was very interesting," answered Mrs. O'Rourke after a moment, evasively.

"Oh you must hear the new pome Miss McCann made last week, Mrs. O'Rourke," said nurse Donovan. "'Tis the loveliest thing ye ever heard."

"I don't suppose anybody cares to hear it though 'tis me last emission?" asked Maggie, with that queer suppressed eagerness.

"Rise it," said Brian, indifferently.

Without waiting for further encouragement, Maggie McCann put one hand on her hip,

“ BRIAN BORU ”

threw her head a little backwards and to one side and began :

Oh! the green, green flag of Ireland is waving
in the breeze,
Our hearts are faithful to it, whether here or
overseas,
For we're thinking of the day when old Ireland
will be free
And the green old flag of Ireland will wave over
liberty. . . .

Maggie's eyes, as she went on, grew more and more moist, her lips seemed to burn themselves dry, and two hectic patches appeared in either cheek. There was something breathless, something apparitional, about the speaker as she took a new breath :

Though they said that we were cowards, that
we'd forgotten Innisfail,
They found that we were Irishmen, whose hearts
had never failed.
When the green, green flag of Ireland o'er the
Postoffice waved,
They found that Irishmen were still the bravest
of the brave.

At the end of the eleventh verse, Miss McCann showed no signs of exhaustion. Sheilah was looking out of the window at the beggarman opposite, while Honora Moriarty, near by, with her beautiful head and misty blue eyes resting

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

upon a cushion of blue silk, looked like a princess in some enchanted castle. Mrs. O'Rourke was lying back in her chair with her eyes closed, whilst her husband yawned as he played with his watch-chain. Nurse Donovan stood with her hands clasped and her eyes fixed in dumb adoration on the face of the poetess.

"Oh, but that was lovely!" she said as the recital came to an end. "Just as lovely as Miss Sheilah's 'Quenchless Flame' that Jasper Moriarty wrote so beautifully about in last week's 'Sniper.'"

Maggie McCann was breathing rapidly, an almost sexual breathing, as she looked from one to the other.

"I'm going to be married," she said inconsequently.

"And who is the happy man?" asked young Brian with the dark little smile in his eyes and the dark lock trembling on his forehead.

"Oh, a man from my own town. He was in the Postoffice during the Rising. It doesn't matter about his name. I'm only marrying him because he is a good Irishman and because Saint Francis came to me in a dream to tell me to do it. 'Tis not that I am in love with him, or any man, but he has been wanting to marry me these nine years and I'd marry any man who did what he did."

"Would you?" said Brian, to add under his breath: "I'm thinkin' you would—or any other that asked you, Miss Maggie McCann."

CHAPTER VI

THE WEST

SHAUN was driving the "conthraction," as he called it, and cursing alternately, with the tag of an old song in between. This was "hell's own convaniency" anyhow—a dilapidated motor car with a tin body set high over the road that shed a nut every five miles and a bolt every ten, "and God alone knows if Miss Sheilah and meself will ever see Achill."

The infernal thing roared and squirted and back-fired, but all the same it had many's the time held its own with the rocky roads of Connemara, and, please the powers! would hold its own again. Didn't the man they hired it from in Galway tell him. . . . But that man was crooked. You could see it in the eye of him.

Sheilah, from her seat by Shaun, felt the loneliness of the old grey stone houses with the purple slates. Then the big empty square with the station hotel on the other side where nobody stayed, and then the inevitable police barracks with the big sleek cats of men basking outside in the autumn sun. And then the broken wall of an ancient church with the green grass and the

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

mosses of the centuries covering it from the eyes of a cruel world.

And the sluice of a river roaring its way to the sea from the lake above ; a tearing sort of river, hurling and howling itself down under the bridge, angry and tumultuous like Ireland—Ireland in flood. And everywhere, the children.

The wild children bred of the Celt and the *Sidhe*, from those days when mortals and immortals consorted together within the green hills of Ireland. The boys with the eyes of burning blue and the big humorsome mouths, running about like wild things amidst the ruins of the past. And the little girls, shy and warm under the tangle of hair, peeping out at the stranger within the gates of Galway city. And the little stucco chapel down there on the left with the lights from the high white altar glowing tenderly through the open doors and the candles for the souls of the dead glimmering in their iron circle and the old men and women praying, praying. . . .

Wasn't Ireland always praying, praying herself into a sort of spiritual stupor and using prayer where others used work ? Didn't she herself pray to the blessed saints—and she born a Protestant ? Wasn't Saint Brigid her own saint—that Saint Brigid who was an incarnation of the Blessed Virgin and she what the people called the queer woman, Protestant and Catholic and Pagan together, as she was, believing the old and the new ?

THE WEST

And were not the ancient gods of pagan Ireland still fighting for Ireland just as the saints of Christian Ireland were still praying for Ireland, up there with the heavenly host ?

For indeed the gods still lived just as lived her beloved *Sidhe*. And she was pagan at heart. If it came to that, wasn't Ireland herself pagan at heart and pantheist—with a veneer of Saint Patrick over her ?

Was not the long struggle of the seven centuries about to renew itself in one griping knot and then, after the grapple, the knot to break for ever and with it the breaking of the chain that held the Irish Celt to the Saxon ?

But here were the English soldiery and the steady ruthless pressure from the other side of the Irish Sea that would force Ireland, to fight for all her Sinn Fein pacifism, to fight and God alone knew what there was at the end of the road.

And here they were at last driving along the shore-road by the Atlantic where it curls away westward—the long grey road. The grey eyes of Sheilah from her seat by the side of Shaun ran along the tremble of the ocean as it pulsed beneath the green veils that spread themselves over its surface from the farther horizon under the September sun.

They were high up over the ocean with the scent of the autumn blackberries coming warmly to the nostrils and the big mountain watcher standing friendly and lowering over there with a mist-cap on his head—the eternal rock telling of the

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

things it had seen through the ages down there in Galway Bay.

Far out there over the sunken fang of rock, the sea was breaking in sulky ripples of purple and white and green under the autumn sun. Oh, the great empty Bay—the desolated Bay! the Bay able to hold they said all the navies of the earth, and not a boat on it, not even a fisherman save that solitary little brown sail out there.

And Shaun and herself? Where in the name of God were they goin' and what would they be after?

Here in this world of upper air, haunted by the wild things, all seemed so unreal. The Irish Republican Brotherhood, that dread secret society known as the "I.R.B." which had sent them down to the West "to prepare."

To prepare for what?

Hadn't they two years before prepared for 1916 and the Rising—and who had risen out of Ireland's millions—they who believed that all Ireland was waiting to reel after them? A poor eighteen hundred. And Padraic Pearse gone to his death under the guns of the soldiers; and Michael Mallin; and young MacDonagh, soul of the brave, with bitter contempt in his young heart for what he called before he faced the guns, "Ireland's great inert mass;" and young Con Colbert and old Tom Clarke, and all of them.

The flower of Ireland, that spiritual conscious minority—all of them lying in quicklime and earth

THE WEST

with half a dozen bullet holes drilled neatly through them. And Connolly, brave Connolly, all gone. All gone.

A curlew called high above them, called lonely, like the soul of Ireland calling to her children. To what children?

Around them the grey stone walls of Cromwell's Connemara—that stonyhearted strip running along the West for hundreds of miles by the side of the gracious Atlantic. She could see down there in the hollow, where a handful or two of earth had cradled itself between the iron-grey rocks, a little cabin, the thatch broken, the little window like a blinded eye and the door gaping—in it the flutter of red flannel and two bare legs.

And behind, the inevitable donkey with the two ears sticking up behind the bramble hedge like those of a hare.

Ireland. Connemara. Iron-grey.

Well, there was Brian O'Rourke left and saved from the guns and Carrara, who had written his name in history, and little Aloysius O'Keeffe, the bravest and holiest little man of them all, and Shaun Brophy there before her. Shaun the Watcher, whose little lime-rotted eyes for all their red rims saw everything. Yes, and there was one other. . . .

There was Jasper Moriarty, the beautiful man that seemed to have a curse on him, the man that nobody wanted, save one. And there was his sister Honora, caring nothing for Ireland and she

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

as beautiful as a star, and, as they said, mad in love with Black Micheal MacGuire and he the enemy of her country—a spy and worse. And if the worst came to the worst, the guns would speak again, and before they went to their deaths by bullet or noose they would write the name of Ireland once more in England's blood.

A great melancholy took possession of her. Maybe the best thing that could happen to Ireland would be for her to disappear in the night—she and all those strange wayward souls within her borders—translated to another plane. Maybe it was that the spirit that was Ireland's could never show itself through Ireland, that it had to find its re-incarnation and its expression in other forms? Maybe Connemara was a dream—that life itself was a dream, that only her beloved *Sidhe*, those beautiful fairies of hers, were real: they and the thoughts of the heart, the things that were called fleeting?

Three years already since the Rising and Griffith and the others trying to win freedom by peace instead of by the gun, and even Brian Boru himself talkin' about negociation and with only Jasper Moriarty, to whom nobody listened, urging the gun and using a bitter language that would make the saints turn on their heavenly beds. Sure that negociation talk was the foolish talk. England only listened when the gun spoke. Hadn't she always given way to force as Michael Davitt had proved long ago? Wasn't that written plain across all Irish history? But now,

THE WEST

the Great War over and the Rising already nearly three years old—what chance did they have? If only all Ireland had risen in 1916!

There was a clap like thunder from under the car. The "conthraction" waltzed a little in the roadway, ran back a few yards and stopped dead, with Shaun leaning both arms over the steering wheel, one shoulder up and one down, a picture of human dejection.

Then, taken with sudden energy, he had dived over the side and under the car, from which came the sound of cursing and a damnable smell.

"God damn and blast it! Miss Sheilah and savin' your presence but if the bloody conthraction hasn't gone and shed a bolt and half a dozen nuts and it gettin' ready and all to blow us to hell. Oh, my God! why did I come on this journey? Will anybody tell me that!"

Two little red and angry eyes peered out for a moment from under the car from the middle of things.

"Isn't it quare now that the Centre itself would be afther sendin' us up through the West to complete the organization for what's comin' in a car that's more like a hearse than a motor? The 'I.R.B.' do be havin' the queer ways. We'll never reach Grana and Father Hickey this night."

Sheilah had unwound herself from a front seat which was more like a trap than a place on

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

which to sit, and in her white motor veil and grey cloak had gone down on her hands and knees in the middle of the white road to become part of it. She bent her head quickly at the same moment that Shaun raised his from under the car, for her face, for one flashing second, to touch that of her travelling companion. The face of Shaun had flushed deeply under its tan, and for a moment the face of the boy, kneeling there in the road, looked up at her, all his soul in his eyes. Then he had dived under the car once more.

"I'm not so sure of Father Hickey, Shaun," said Sheilah quickly from above him, bringing her veil down over her face. "I'm thinkin' he's one of the real old Nationalist brigade—whiskey and bacon and eggs and hell to your soul if you go against the Church."

"Oh, 'tis Sinn Fein that changed all that and put the priest's nose out of joint and out of politics—and anyhow didn't we come down here to the wild west to thry him out with the others?" answered her travelling companion, emerging for an instant to do something with the levers in the car.

"Well, he has the Grana district in the hollow of his hands, Shaun boy, and we must either frighten him or cajole him. I know we can't shoot him, he being a priest and all, but we can put the fear of Sinn Fein if not the fear of God into him."

The woman standing there on the white road

THE WEST

in her slender fairness spoke with the little whimsical smile that was her own and as though it were all in the day's work.

"I know that and . . . glory be to God!" Shaun broke off, "but the conthraction's changed its mind:

*"'Tis a woman's per-og-a-tive to change her mind,
To send ye to hell or to heaven so kind.
But be sure ye won't know it, bekase love is blind,"
Said Pad to the Mom as he sthruck her down from
behind.*

Shaun's little improvisation was his pæan of praise. He was right. The engine was turning as smoothly as though it had never thought of going wrong in its life.

"But that's the cunning of the conthraction," said Shaun, closing one little eye in the way that he had when sceptical. He used the gesture for everything, from his doubts about saints and angels to motor-cars. "It do be pretendin' to be all right so as to get us on the road again, and then, before you can say 'blast your sowl!' it's broken down again. But here goes."

He climbed into the driver's seat, pulled a lever over, and off they went, Miss Sheilah floating up and down like a bubble in the back seat to which she had moved in order to give the driver greater freedom in event of emergency, Shaun's teeth shaking in his head—but the car going, which, after all, was the great thing.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

They had run from between two high stony hills, where only the plover wheeled and the grouse whirred out on to one of the great plains of the West with the purple heather stretching to the horizon where another line of hills showed themselves faint to the eye. Throughout all that waste into which they had run, there showed no sign of human being, of beast or of bird, nothing even of the handiwork of man save the narrow riband of white road that wound through the centre.

Hour after hour they drove across it, meaning to reach the priest's house before nightfall if it was the will of God. Through that long day they had seen the sun rise and hold and decline, and as it set in a golden haze over against the west, leaving behind it the ribbed bars of roseate clouds spanning the evening skies, with a single fainted star trembling on their right, Sheilah leaned forward to tap Shaun on the shoulder.

"Look ahead, Shaun."

Shaun looked, but those red-rimmed eyes of his which saw everything and nothing could not see what the keen grey eye of the woman behind saw. It was a black patch on the naked road, and then another and smaller patch a little to one side of it, just where a bog pool lay, a peaty black with the promise of starshine in it.

As they drew near, Shaun for all his agnosticism, instinctively crossed himself and even Sheilah muttered something under her breath,

THE WEST

the patches looked so stark and lonely in that place of desolation.

The car clanked its way up along the twisty road until they came to the bog pool gleaming in iridescent purples and golds under the waning lights.

It was a side-car flung on its side in the road—by it a horse, a poor broken mouse-coloured horse lying dejectedly on its side, showing a crimson gash the length of its belly, its bowels strewing the road. Just beyond, lying across the horse's back, where he had pitched from his seat and looking out ahead, lay the driver—a little grey-faced man with long respectable side-whiskers, his face setting in the rigidity of death. His crafty grey eyes still looked before him as though immensely surprised, and his jaw had dropped.

It was an intensely dejected head, an intensely surprised head, with the back of it blown away into a sort of bloody blind mask, the wall eye of the horse staring backwards and upwards at the mask lying across it, as though also astonished.

Where the nape of the neck had been, a piece of white paper was pinned :

SHOT BY ORDER OF THE I.R.B.

TRAITORS, BEWARE !

Shaun looked at Sheilah, but Sheilah looked down at the dead man and horse.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Shaun pointed to a bundle of hay that lay at the side of the pool, the only cover in that desolated plain.

Sheilah followed his finger.

"I think we'll be driving," she said, simply.

"We will," said Shaun.

They climbed into the "conthraction," which went wheezing and rattling its way into the distance, leaving behind it under the lone stars now showing themselves in the skies of evening, the man and the car and the horse.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRIEST

IT was a low greystone thatched house set a little back from the road where it wound out of the plain and it was surrounded by a low stone wall over which a few laurels showed themselves. One drove around a sort of half circle, in through one little gate and out through the other, for it had more than the pretensions of comfort.

There was behind it a snug little orchard and the makings of a farm with plenty of hens and chickens and geese and turkeys in evidence, and before the house, paddling in the clear peat stream flowing out of the bog, a covey of ducks. Everything to the makings of an easy existence in this world with the comfortable assurances of theology of the same thing in the next.

That was the priest's house at Grana.

A little withered woman in a red flannel petticoat and black stuff bodice pierced by her high stays which she wore like a sort of holy investiture and wearing a pair of shoes which pinched feet that had seldom felt leather, opened the door, wiping her skinny hands on her coarse woollen

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

apron as she did so. She was Father Hickey's housekeeper, "Biddy the Vet," a name given to her in a place where all had their nicknames, because of her luck with sick animals.

Father Peter Hickey himself as he appeared in the doorway of the little sitting-room, with the comfortable arm-chair on one side of the bright fire and a little secret cupboard within handy reach of the priest's arm, was a big man with what seemed at first sight a round jovial face, but which on nearer acquaintance two of the shrewdest grey eyes in Ireland, each eye with a little black point in it. "A good man for a friend but a bad man to offend," as the little man who stood under the lea of his reverence's shoulder would say.

Mr. Jeremiah Murphy, his hands set comfortably deep in his capacious cross-pockets, was a smallish man with a square, clay-coloured beard and the nose of a parrot which came out from between two fishy eyes.

"Jerry the Gombeen Man," as he was known, was a great friend of the priest and indeed, with him, had held the little village of Grana and the district around it more or less in the hollows of those same big pockets, in each of which the hard hands gripped a handful of silver, for had he not "advanced a little money when times were hard" to nearly every member of the good father's congregation? True, he charged his little "interest" as he would say, the pale eyes fixed stedfastly on the face of his client, a little interest

THE PRIEST

that might mean anything from twenty to two hundred per cent, "for times were hard and since the Nationalist Party left Westminster and the coming of the Sinn Fein fly-by-nights, honest men could never be sure of anything."

"And how are ye, and how are ye, ma'am?" Father Peter asked as he bustled forward, holding out two enormous paws of welcome. "This is me friend, Mr. Murphy," he said, indicating his companion, who came out from under his shoulder and then went back again like a fox going to ground, "and I only wish there were more like him. I've just been reading your credentials from the Boord. And so you're coming down here to teach us to make lace and silk buttons. 'Tis a great work you are doin' ma'am."

The Congested Districts Board, known throughout the West as "the Boord," originally established by an English Government to teach the aborigines of the West lace-making and weaving and so relieve the most intensive poverty in the world, had, like so many other things of the enemy, been pressed into the service of Sinn Fein.

Miss Sheilah Shaw's credentials, in which her name appeared as Katherine McGraw, had been typed upon the official paper of the Board, which had been purloined for the purpose, not a difficult matter in an institution which, like the Irish Civil Service, reeked with Sinn Feiners.

So it was that, for the nonce, Sheilah was an inspector of the Board and Shaun her chauffeur. "The Boord" would not find it out for a couple

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

of months anyhow and even when it was discovered it would only make everybody laugh that laughter which was the universal solvent of all things in Ireland, the thing that solved all problems of work or play, of life or death, and always a sting in the heart of it.

If an Irishman lifted himself above his fellows in Ireland itself or even, at times, distinguished himself in the great world outside—laugh at him. If a man cut his throat or his finger—laugh. If a man died or a child was born—laugh. Laugh when men were dying or hearts were breaking. Laugh in sorrow and laugh in joy. Laugh at life and laugh at death. The laughter with death in the heart of it, as the maggot lies in the heart of the rose.

“Yes, we’ve come down for the Congested Districts Board, Father,” said Sheilah, “and this is my chauffeur, Nicky Farrell. I am Miss McGraw and I am making a tour of my future constituency so to speak—lace-making and button-spinning and all that.”

“Oh, the Boord, the Boord, ma’am. That’s the the great institution entirely. What Ireland wants is factories on the English model. If only they’d mind the Boord and learn to make a bit of money, as I often tell me parishioners, maybe they’d be able to pay their lawful dues to the Church, instead of all this wild gallivantin’ over the hills and far away. Ah! ’tis little of that there was when poor John Redmond was alive and the Nationalist Party.

THE PRIEST

"But won't ye be sittin' down, Miss McGraw? Biddy the Vet can make your driver comfortable in the kitchen." Sheilah took a chair as Shaun went out into the kitchen.

"I'm not so sure about the Boord as Father Peter here," said the little gombeen man, once more protruding his crafty head around the bulk of the priest. "It does be makin' the people discontinued, as I often tell him, with all the money they earn. And if it comes to that, I don't believe they earn so much after all," he said, illogically. "Let them stick to the land like their fathers before them, as I tell them."

"Sure a potato is a potato, but what's a bit of lace? Tell me that"—he looked around him argumentatively. "Puttin' ideas in the heads of the young girls and desthroyin' their souls. And the Boord almost givin' the fishermen their gear for nothing and all and honest men like meself being driven out of business."

"Oh, sure, what's troublin' our friend here is that he had to shut up his little store down by the Black Strand," said Father Peter humorously.

"Well, and didn't I, Father Peter, if it comes to that?" asked Jerry the Gombeen Man in angry expostulation. "Where they'd come to me for a bit of a net or a sail or a length of rope, now, if ye plaze, they go to the Boord and I losin' money all the time. Give us peace to make our little profits, I say."

He ploughed angrily in his pockets and retired

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

once more behind the priest, who had been standing all this time.

"But me friend here is not doin' so badly, ma'am," said the priest, his eyes twinkling. There was a world of craftiness in the grey moist eye. "And sure he's lookin' well afther the main chance and 'tis the main chance that looks well afther him and who can blame him?" he said, the eyes twinkling again. But Mr. Jeremiah Murphy's countenance showed no expansiveness as it came out for a moment, only for its owner to withdraw it behind the priest in irritated silence. The head of the good father, round as a mangel-wurzel and set deep between the giant shoulders, seemed to show a certain malicious satisfaction.

"And how are things going down here, are they quiet?" asked the fictitious Miss McGraw to break what was becoming an awkward silence.

"Things" in Ireland always mean politics. The term is perfectly understood. "Are things quiet?" in the more exacerbated periods means: "Is anybody shooting anybody else?" "Are there troubles?" means "Are there political troubles?" There are many felicitous terms to describe the politics which are the soul of Ireland.

"Quiet ma'am? Not a bit of it. Wasn't me own little church invaded last Sunday by a lot of dirty blackguards marching up with the Sinn Fein tricolour at their head, and it was only when I went out to them and tould them they

THE PRIEST

couldn't bring their dirty revolutionary flag into the House of God that they put it down. There is no religion in this country to-day—not since the Nationalists left Westminster, where they were the watchdogs of Holy Church.

"But maybe, ma'am, you're not a Catholic and you from the Boord and all?" The little eyes looked cunningly at her.

"Oh, I'm as good a Catholic as the next, if that's what you mean, Father. But things, as ye say, are not what they used to be in the good old days."

"True for ye, ma'am. And now there's this Irish . . . the Gaelic League trying to learn them the Irish and talking to them about the Gael and all that blatherskite. As if Irish was going to be any good to them. Of course I shpake it meself, being reared with it and the most of me parishioners not having the English, but it's a heathen language anyhow and I do always be tellin' them that if they want to get on in the world they'll learn the English, which'll be some use to them. Ye can't do business in Irish.

"There's me curate now, Father Quinn, and he cracked on the Irish. He's always talkin' Irish and sayin' that Irish is the natural language of the Gael (what's a 'Gael' anyhow?) and he's as full of sedition as an egg is full of meat or this bottle full of Johnny Walker—but I'm expectin' him every moment and maybe you'll see him before you go."

As he spoke, Father Hickey reached his hand

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

over to the little black cupboard at the side of him and took out a quart bottle of whiskey, full to the top.

"What'll ye be havin' now, Miss McGraw, ma'am, afther your long ride? I always keep a drop for the Boord." And he laughed with his mouth but not with his eyes, did Father Hickey.

"My doctor forbids me any whiskey, Father," said Sheilah in her rich Dublin contralto. "But may be, if you wouldn't mind tryin' him, Nicky outside in the kitchen wouldn't say 'no' to a finger of whiskey."

"Ah, that's the right sort, ma'am. Show me the man who can toss off his noggin with the best and you see the man that's all right. These Sinn Feiners, now, all of them teetotallers!" He laughed derisively. "Sayin' they give up the drink for the cause. They and their Cause."

"Even me curate is a member of the League of the Cross and doesn't take anything. I think everybody's goin' mad these times—not of course that I'm against the great Father Mathew and his league if a man feels himself taken that way," he added diplomatically as though teetotalism was a sort of disease.

As he spoke, there was a knock at the door and a young priest entered. He was a graceful-looking boyish priest in the early twenties with fair rather curling hair, already thinning over the lofty forehead. His eyes were of a lightsome blue, as though some interior flame were shining

THE PRIEST

through them, whilst his high oval face with the curious lumps over the eyes that so often show imagination, which set itself over his white priestly collar gave altogether an impression of chasteness. His hands were long and delicate despite the light reddish hair which covered them and it seemed to Sheilah that he was on the whole such a blend of humanness and saintliness that it was a joy to look at him.

"And here comes himself," said Father Hickey, not altogether graciously as it seemed to Sheilah. "Here we have our sea-green Sinn Feiner in the flesh . . . my curate, Father Con Quinn." He introduced him collectively with an expansive wave of one hairy paw.

The young priest bowed with a certain slender graciousness. There was humour in his smile.

"I've been tellin' the company, Father Con, that you're great on the Irish." Father Peter seemed to have taken on a mantle of bad humour for some reason not quite clear.

"And why shouldn't I be, Father ?" he asked. "Isn't it the tongue of our fathers and don't we think in the Irish idiom even when we speak in the English ? Don't you think in it yourself, if it comes to that ? Aren't you speaking the Irish idiom all the time and you brought up on the Irish ?"

"I am that, bad cess to it !" Father Peter scratched his head with the perplexity that is Ireland's, dragged like all Irishmen between intuition and logic. "And, anyhow, what's the

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

use of fightin' against what you can't help ? Nobody outside Ireland uses the Irish and very few in Ireland. The English is bound to drive it out in the long last and ye can't have two languages anyhow any more than ye can think in two languages. Why, what was it ye said yourself the other day—wasn't it that the Gaelic League only worked for the time but that the great world was always at work ? Didn't ye now ? ” he pressed as he saw the look almost of despair on the other's face.

Seeing his advantage, he continued :

“ What's the good of a language in which ye can't do business—and whether we like it or not aren't we bound to England both in business and politics ? Tell me that ? ”

“ Not ‘ whether we like it or not, ’ ” answered the young priest gently. “ It is because we don't like not to like it that we are bound. If we liked it, we could be free to-morrow. We have to free ourselves from ourselves. We could speak our own tongue in a Gaelic Ireland as the Englishman speaks his tongue in an English England.”

“ There ye have him now, Miss McGraw,” said Father Peter again scratching his head like some perplexed baboon, this time with two hairy paws. “ There ye have our Sinn Feiner—dead to everything that is practical. Wants to drive every Englishman out of Ireland and with him every bit of good Saxon money. I can't get the right understandin' of these new politics at all at all.”

THE PRIEST

"If it comes to that," said Mr. Murphy, coming out from behind the priest, "I'm with him. Let Sinn Fein drive out the money that's pauperising the people, money like the money of the Boord, and I'm wid him to a cinder." It was the eternal muddle and struggle in the political mentality of his country.

"But I don't want to drive a single Englishman out of Ireland," said Father Con quickly. "I simply want Ireland for the Irish just as the Englishman wants England for the English. I want to do business with England and to let Englishmen live here. I stand for the thing that Wolfe Tone stood for and for which Mitchel stood."

"And where'd ye be in a hundred years," asked Father Peter triumphantly, "if ye had thousands of English in the country? Sure wouldn't we have an English Ireland then? Even John Redmond never wanted that."

"Let them come," said Father Con, quietly. "We would do what we have done during the past seven hundred years—we would turn Englishmen into Irishmen and into good Irishmen in the alchemy that is Ireland's. Don't you know, Father Peter, that the best Irishmen, the men who led every rebellion for an Irish Ireland, have nearly always had English blood in their veins? Wasn't Padraic Pearse himself, that led in 1916, half English? The children of the English of one generation are the Irish of the Irish of the next."

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"Ah, there's no cornering this fellow," said Father Peter as though bemused. "It's my belief he'd get out of hell itself if he started arguin' with the Divil. And the Bishop himself couldn't do anything wid him, tellin' him to keep clear of politics and not to be rushin' in where angels feared to tread. I don't know what's become of religion these days. The Sinn Feiners would question the Holy Father himself."

"'I'll take my religion from Rome but my politics from hell or Constantinople,'" said young Father Con quoting a famous saying. "The Bishop is my spiritual superior. He is not my temporal. And there are those who are higher than the Bishop so high and all as he is."

"Blasphemy! Blasphemy!" ejaculated Father Peter, hazily.

"Then the Bishop is not a Sinn Feiner?" asked Miss McGraw innocently.

"Oh ma'am, av coorse he's not," said Father Peter holding up his hairy paws in horror at the thought. "None of the bishops want Ireland away from England. And he has been down here preaching against Sinn Fein violence . . . maybe ye hold wid the gun, Father Con," he asked malevolently, breaking suddenly off and turning to his revolutionary curate.

"I do not," said his curate. "Sinn Fein was founded on pacifism. I hate violence of any kind, but if England takes up the gun, so must we. Those that live by the gun will die by the gun. I know that."

THE PRIEST

"If Sinn Fein doesn't stand for the gun, what does it stand for," asked Mr. Jeremiah Murphy, again protuberant. "Didn't the boys threaten to shoot me if I asked for me little bit of interest from Rafferty down in the hollow? Where's there law and order in that? Gun indade! I'll be losin' me fine life arguin' some of these fine days about guns, for doesn't Sinn Fein say that the gun settles all arguments and doesn't every blackguard in the country who wants to wipe off an old score call himself a Sinn Feiner?"

"Not the real Sinn Fein," said Father Con, whose colour was mounting under the fairness of his skin.

"What is the rale Sinn Fein, if I may make bowld to ask?" said Father Peter with a threatening politeness.

Young Father Con looked confused as though he didn't quite know himself. . . .

There was a knock at the door and Biddy the Vet appeared, concern on her old crinkled face.

"Tom hasn't come in yet," she said, "with the letters and there's a man outside that says he has somethin' to tell your reverence."

The priest, got up and with an excuse left the room, after a moment calling to his curate and to Jerry the Gombeen Man to come out. The moment he had left, the fictitious Miss McGraw sprang to the cupboard and rummaged there amongst some letters which she examined rapidly, reaching her chair again with one in her hand.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

She could hear the sound of voices outside. First the voice of the priest and then the deeper tones of a stranger. She listened intently.

Father Hickey appeared, his eyes creased still more in the fleshy holster of his face.

"Did ye pass anything on the road, Miss McGraw," he asked quietly.

Miss McGraw looked at him and he looked at Miss McGraw. There was a perfect understanding between them. She knew that he knew about the man and the horse, and she knew that he was wondering why she, a servant of "the Boord," had not said anything about it—a fatal slip.

"I did, Father," she replied as quietly. "But we thought it was better not to say anything about it."

The good Father was thinking deeply. Suddenly he looked up and said:

"And ye did right, ma'am. Ye'll be understandin' that what I said about the chapel and the Sinn Feiners and all was necessary to thry ye out in these troubled times. I'm a good Irishman but it wouldn't do for me to take sides and the bishop always watching. Sure 'tis terrible what the Black and Tans have been doin' and these reprisals will happen. I'm afraid Tom the driver was suspected for a spy. Ye'll understand all that, Miss McGraw." He smiled slyly to her.

"I understand perfectly," said Miss McGraw.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE SIGN OF "THE SUNBURST"

SHAUN and Sheilah, in the great circle they were making southwards, drove that night to the village of Letterkilleen, where they lay in a farmer's house, as always leaving behind them the story of what, this time, was to be Ireland's unconquerable resolve and her determination to have a Republic or nothing.

And all through the next day, they drove towards Ennis through the soft mizzle across the dreary wastes of West Clare, stripped of every human thing as though the finger of God had touched it.

For in Ennis they were to get the report of Jasper Moriarty, himself an "I.R.B." man, and now after many heartbreaking delays used on one of the secret missions covering Ireland.

The night was falling as they drove along the weary grey road that wanders into Ennis from the south. Sheilah, staring before her through the drizzle, saw a tall man in urgent conversation with a big policeman in peaked cap pulled well down over the eyes and with his hands put snugly under his grey cape. She saw the tall

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

man look up quickly as he turned away, walking down the narrow *boreen* that ran off the main road to the right.

As they passed the mouth of the boreen to look down it, a memory came to her. Despite the big soft hat pulled well around him, she could not mistake that characteristic stoop and slender willowy passage. It was Jasper Moriarty, or his ghost.

As for the sergeant, a big black-avised fellow with a rollicking blue eye and black moustache, he looked over the hedges at the side—everywhere except at them, with that elaborate innocence of the official sleuth, but she knew that he saw everything and already was making a mental note as to their car and themselves for his next report to Dublin Castle.

Jasper, she knew, had been sent down to Ennis to help to knit two warring factions—but for what was he speaking to a sergeant of the Royal Irish Constabulary on a lonely road in the falling night?

As they came into Ennis with the contraption, now on its own uncertain best behaviour, for as Shaun said: “mysterious indade are the ways of God,” it was to meet a great armoured car with a high steel tower on it from a slit in which protruded a machine gun and, his round good-humoured head with its iron hat on it just showing itself over the top, a British Tommy as foreign in that Irish town as though he were a Chinese, not a man, woman or child looking at

AT THE SIGN OF "THE SUNBURST"

him or his tower of war. And so into the little hotel where they were to stop the night.

As they pulled up the contraption with a clanking which threatened to shake it to pieces, there came to Sheilah's nostrils from a bar that was half a grocery that extraordinary blend of scents which seemed to her so warm and familiar—the blend of fresh roll plug and whiskey and groceries that she had known from childhood. What a queer thing smells were. They made you happy or miserable, but they never left you indifferent.

There in the little bar of Miss Mulligan's were Ireland's janissaries—the great policemen, sleek and well-fed as pet cats in their peaked caps and greeney-black uniforms, and as much part of the Irish landscape as the donkeys or the furze. They were magnificent human specimens with great loose shoulders and close-knit hips, but there was a beaten look about their heads as though they had been crushed. "Fine bodies with maimed souls," thought Sheilah.

But Miss Mulligan herself behind the bar with her round mottled face and neat black dress was as nice to the police as she was to the other customers who went in and out. After all, Government money was as good as any other, and there ye had it! Wasn't it the great pity that the Sinn Feiners couldn't stop their nonsense and let the country get back to peace and quiet so that honest people could make their little profits? Ah, there were plenty that thought the same as

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

herself, but they were afraid of the Sinn Feiners.

And here was "the Boord" itself. Nothing could be too good for Miss McGraw and Micky the driver. It was nothing but: "Biddy be quick with them bacon and eggs and put on a couple of extra rashers—the kind we always keep for the Boord, Miss McGraw." And there was a bottle of the best for Nicky and as Nicky himself put it to himself after the discovery: "lashin's and lavin's for nothing."

And through it all, Miss Mulligan had time to throw a roguish eye on Sergeant Michael MacGuire—that big buck sergeant over near the window whom Maggie was serving this very moment. Sergeant Michael MacGuire, well in with the Castle and a trusted man wid a pair of shoulders that every girl in Clare would be glad to have about her. Sergeant MacGuire, about whom there were so many strange stories, for indeed it was the bad luck that followed him and wherever he went trouble trod on his heels—but they were only stories and maybe the half of them wasn't true at all at all.

What was that story they were tellin' about Mary Donovan, the wife of Con Donovan that had served the English well in the Boer War and he wid medals. That was an ugly story. with its tale of how the brave sergeant had entered the house of the man under the pretence of a search warrant and had put a sentry on his door and taken his wife into the outhouse and her cries for mercy and what he did to her and all. Well,

AT THE SIGN OF "THE SUNBURST"

everybody knew that story, and Con himself and his wife had gone the morning after to the police barracks where the rollicking sergeant himself had seen them and counselled them to say nothing—for nothing more had been heard about it . . . and maybe there was nothin' in it afther all for weren't we livin' in the quare times and didn't we hear the quare things? "And what was that ye said, Miss McGraw—me thoughts were elsewhere?"

Sheilah, as she talked with Miss Mulligan, looked at little dark-haired dark-eyed Maggie who was serving the big sergeant with a jorum of whiskey and a steak, and Maggie looked at her. Yes, that must be Maggie O'Connor the waitress at "The Sunburst" and a local agent of the I.R.B.

Maggie, a pleasant-faced laughing-eyed girl, was listening to the gallant sergeant's rather broad jests with a toss of the head and an indulgent glance which must have been highly satisfactory to the sergeant who was a notorious lady-killer and from whose splendid loins had sprung many ill-considered children now in the work-houses of Clare. The steak was done to a turn and as Maggie placed the pot of newly made mustard before him and with it a plate of a cabbage and a dish of fine floury potatoes, the sergeant let his belt out a hole and took up his knife and fork to enjoy himself. After all, Ireland was a country worth living in for a man who knew how to keep in with the authorities and as

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

long as there were beefsteaks and porter and the pick of a fine life at "The Sunburst" . . . and girls, it wasn't Sergeant Mike MacGuire who'd be complainin'.

Sheilah went into the back parlour upon Miss Mulligan's suggestion that the bacon and eggs and "the couple of extra rashers" would be there before she could turn herself round twice.

The tall figure she knew so well was standing before Miss Mulligan's old pier glass carefully smoothing his black hair back with both hands over the close-set ears. There came to her, as always, that feeling of looking at a saint in a window, and from where she stood in the door she could see those strangely light blue eyes with their characteristic black irises regarding their owner with an admiration not unconcealed. Well, she had never denied Jasper Moriarty his vanity, and though vain men were dangerous men, there was something here more than mere danger. There might be treachery.

The eyes in the glass had turned a little to see the woman standing behind, and then their owner had turned too.

"Ah, Sheilah, is that you!" he said. "I got the word from the boys and came here. I have a lot to tell you and the Centre."

The tall woman looked at the man before her and wondered. Here was no trace of uneasiness or guilt, and many was the time that Jasper Moriarty showed both without any reason at all.

AT THE SIGN OF "THE SUNBURST"

He suspected everybody, including himself and the Centre. She knew that. It meant nothing more. Many Irishmen were like that.

She greeted him with that cool self-possession that had given her the name for being cold. And then they had plunged into a mass of facts and figures connected with the work of the Brotherhood.

"Is there anybody down here doing the spying for the Government?" asked Sheilah, quietly, when they had finished the main work and glancing at her companion.

"There is, that same," Jasper answered without a moment's hesitation. "And his name's Sergeant MacGuire that I used to go to school with in the old days in Dublin. Sure wasn't he one of the 'G' division men, but now he has come out of plain clothes into uniform. They've bought him body and soul and he wance as good an Irishman as myself."

"You haven't been able to do a bit of spying on him yourself have you, Jasper?" She asked it indifferently enough.

Jasper turned his eyes away, those eyes that had been fixed with such intensity on the woman before him. There was a momentary pause before the reply came:

"And of course and I have," he said.

"You don't mean you have been able to speak with him?" asked Sheilah.

There was again that pause as Jasper Moriarty bit his nails.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"Why of course you know very well, Sheilah, what would happen to me if I were seen speakin' to a sergeant of the Royal Irish and he the best hated man in Ennis."

Perhaps she had been mistaken. It had been very dark. And Shaun had said nothing. Maybe it wasn't Jasper after all who had been speaking to the sergeant and there were plenty of tall plainclothes men doing the dirty work for Dublin Castle, any one of whom might have been reporting to Black Michael.

All at once she seemed to take sudden resolution.

"Jasper," she said, leaning forwards earnestly across the little table between them. "You know what there was once between us—everything and nothing. For the sake of old times, for what never could be but which might have been, I am taking my own life in my hands to tell you that there have been those who have said that you were seen speaking to the sergeant."

The ivory pallor of the man before her had gone a pasty white.

"It is a lie—a damned lie!" he said. And then in anger uncontrollable: "Do ye think I am the Judas some of them call me! Oh! I know it well."

"There may be those that call you"—and she hesitated a moment—"Judas, Jasper, and it is not that I mean but . . ."

"But everyone knows who started that hare,"

AT THE SIGN OF "THE SUNBURST"

he put in. "That was Clarence Mangan who hates me because he's jealous of my writing—aren't we Irishmen all eaten up by jealousy? You know as well as I, Sheilah, I could have sold myself long ago if I had wished. It wasn't for want of offers," he added bitterly, and stopped as though he had said too much.

"What offers?" asked Sheilah.

"Never mind, Sheilah," he answered.

CHAPTER IX

SERGEANT MACGUIRE

SHEILAH, sitting in her corner in the back parlour of "The Sunburst," drinking good strong tea and eating bacon with golden eggs fried between the rashers and feeling thankful to God for good food, watched Maggie O'Connor through the little window looking into the bar, as she went on calmly with her work of serving the big sergeant.

Black Michael MacGuire was thawing more and more under the refilled glass and had now removed his belt with its holster and big brown-handled revolver, which he placed by his plate for greater ease.

Sure didn't the Ennis people know him and didn't he know them? They dared not put a hand on him, Donovan's wife and all. And he would not have done what he did if he hadn't had a drop taken. Sure wasn't it a good man's case? And he had squared Donovan who had been in the army and understood things.

It was a case for Donovan of five years on an information or a five pound note—and be God! he took the note. He was the boyo and knew

SERGEANT MACGUIRE

which side his bread was buttered—not like that bloody fool Moriarty who refused good Castle money and didn't seem to know his own mind.

As the gallant sergeant ate up the last piece of steak and swallowed the last glass of whiskey, he felt at peace with all the world. Maggie he looked over with an appraising eye. Sure didn't they all start that way wid a toss of the head and the "don't lay a hand on me or I'll kill meself—" but it all ended the same way. But it was he that had the way wid the girls. And Sergeant Michael MacGuire laughed behind his big black moustache.

But the big man became suddenly serious.

Sure wasn't little Bridget waiting for him outside and he promising to meet her sharp on the hour and she the rich farmer's only daughter. If it only weren't that he was more than half in love for the first time in his life with Honora Moriarty and more than half promised to her. But he was also promised to little Bridget and she with the money. Now if Jasper Moriarty wasn't such a damned fool and would so to speak join in the partnership of himself and Honora and work for the Castle, couldn't they all three make a nice thing of it? But Jasper wouldn't an' he wouldn't and there was an end of it—and the fine offers he had made to him, damn his sowl!

So it would have to be Bridget afther all, and she wid the money bags. Well, he'd have to be droppin' all his galivantin's after he was spliced and live a quiet and respectable life—maybe over

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

there in London when he got promotion. Oh! but 'twas hard to leave the girls.

He looked at Maggie regretfully as she laid some dirty glasses on the bar. . . . But 'twas hard to leave the girls.

Well, the clock was pointing two minutes to the hour and he had to meet her dead on time.

Sheilah looked at the big man as he buckled on his belt with the revolver in it. She looked at his dark blue eye and big wavy moustache and at his well-filled belly. And she looked at Maggie telling him how much he owed and not flinching when he put one great hairy paw upon her cheek and pinched it. But all the same, her face went white, and it came to Sheilah, watching there through the little window, that all things considered it might have been a little less dangerous for the gallant sergeant to have pinched the cheek of a black pantheress.

Maggie was the exception. She knew there were many girls in the street outside that would not say "No" to a kiss from the big sergeant. Hadn't she seen the girls standing in the Galway streets talking to the English soldiers and flirting with them—and they with Ireland under their heels. It was little that Ireland meant to many of the girls of to-day with their hats and gloves and English ways, for all that the Irishwoman, in the mass, was good and chaste and she a Sinn Feiner more often than not. And there was Maggie giving the big man his change, and smiling to him like a rattlesnake.

SERGEANT MACGUIRE

She watched the giant lounge out of the bar, his shoulders filling the doorway. And she watched him pass the window of "The Sunburst" as he walked, a little unsteadily, down the street, and she watched him from the street window of the little parlour meet the little black-haired blue-eyed girl with the hat and jacket of the prosperous farmer's daughter, who had been waiting for him, saw her speak to him and then turn to walk along the flagstones by his side, her comely dark head not much over his elbow, and he looking down over her with a laughing roll of his blue eye as a cock will look sideways at a little fat pullet.

Ah, 'twas he that had the lust of life, had Sergeant Mike MacGuire.

CHAPTER X

JASPER MORIARTY

THEY were driving out into the warm smother of the south-west wind with the rain swishing softly about them, when Shaun said to his travelling companion :

"They found something on the sergeant. Maggie got it out of his wallet when he loosened his belt." Then he was silent with his little red eyes fixed on the wet grey road before them from under his big brimmed cap.

"What did they find, Shaun ?" asked Sheilah, after a moment.

"They found a paper," said Shaun and was again silent as though even the grey road might hear.

"What was on it, Shaun ?" asked Sheilah, after another pause.

"There was a name," said Shaun, still with that iron secrecy of the Southern Celt.

"What was the name ?"

But Shaun would not say any more, and at that moment, the "conthraction," after emitting two unexpected blasts behind, rattled a little and stopped dead as Shaun dived over the car like a man going off from a springboard into the sea.

JASPER MORIARTY

There was the usual halt with the wind and the rain soaking the man under the car as he lay on his belly in the mud, whilst above, Sheilah cowered from the blast in her great hooded cloak. After the usual exchange of opinions between the car and Shaun, in which Shaun was distinctly worsted by two back-fires from the beast, he climbed into his seat again and away they clattered over the grey landscape under the strange snortings and gurglings of the "contraption."

Sheilah did not ask her driver any more about the paper, knowing that if he wished to speak of it he would speak, and that if he did not, nothing in the heavens above or in the earth beneath could make him do so. For Shaun's was the suppression, the terrible suppression of the Irishman.

All at once the big peaked cap turned to her and from under it came the single word: "Jasper."

"So that's how it is, is it?" she asked after a moment as though to herself.

"That's the way of it," said Shaun the Watcher.

They had gone perhaps another four or five miles, when Shaun said: "That man MacGuire was from the same part of Dublin as Jasper and they went to the Christian Brothers' school together, and it seems that the authorities sent the sergeant up from the West where he was stationed to see what he could do wid Moriarty."

"And did he?" asked Sheilah, simply.

"He didn't," came the unexpected reply. "They offered him a big price, too, and he as

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

poor as Lazarus, but he wouldn't and our man at the Castle told me he cursed and raved like a man with a devil in him, so they dropped him . . . for the time."

"I never really doubted Jasper," said Sheilah as though in defence of something, "though 'tis well he always had his sister Honora by his side as his good angel and she next door to a saint. But he's a disappointed man, Shaun, and a bitter man and a clever man. And that's a bad combination."

"It is hell's own," said Shaun.

"And he's poor, with Molly down there on the Quay and a houseful of children and all."

"That's just it, Miss Sheilah," said Shaun and blushed as he used her name. "But that's not all and that devil MacGuire knows it."

He went on: "There's another key to Jasper Moriarty, and it's not a golden key, and if ever they thry it it'll turn the lock and the thrick."

"I don't think you have any right to say that, Shaun," said his companion, gravely.

"Ah, but I know," said Shaun the Watcher, shaking his little head and closing one sceptical eye. "D'ye think I don't know Jasper and he and I knowin' each other these long years—I that knew O'Reilly and the others? What was it that sent O'Reilly in to the Postoffice but ambition? Tell me that. What was it that put Moriarty into the house near the canal?—why, the same thing. Ah, don't be tellin' me!"

"But he fought bravely and, as you know, he

JASPER MORIARTY

has been in gaol for Ireland and has helped the cause with pen and tongue and risked his life ? ”

“ Sure isn’t that the Irishman all over ? Did ye ever see the Irishman yet who was not as full of mixed motives as a rotten egg is full of bad meat ? Aren’t we all heroes and traitors and hasn’t every Irishman an angel and a devil in him ? ”

He was silent a moment.

“ Don’t we talk big things and mean big things—yes, and be God ! don’t we sometimes do big things—and is there wan of us that trusts the other fellow ? Tell me that.”

Again he was silent, and again he went on as though under some ungovernable thrust :

“ We have done our best to kill Ireland, but there is something in us that cannot be killed, something that is immortal. Maybe it is Ireland herself—for Ireland is wan thing and her people another.”

“ But you are yourself a contradiction to what you say, Shaun boy. Do you think I don’t trust you and you me, and aren’t you risking all for Ireland ? ”

“ Aye, and often I do be askin’ meself what I am riskin’ it for and why I am riskin’ it—and when an Irishman begins to ask questions it’s all over wid him. But it is something I’m in and so I must go through with it. And Jasper Moriarty is a man with a curse.”

“ I often think that every Irishman is cursed, but he carries the curse inside himself,” said

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Sheilah. "And you can't kill him any more than you can kill Ireland. Sometimes I think," she went on, "that you can't kill Ireland because she is so unconscious."

They had come to a turn in the road, with the rain still soaking them through and through, when they saw a man coming towards them.

He was a tall man with a long beard and a high forehead and he looked like a wandering saint. The rain swooshed through his long beard and through the old battered felt hat he wore with a wisp of hair sticking up through the crown, in all that drizzle, rebelliously. The rain soaked through the broken boots which squelched tears at every step he took. And it soaked through the clothes that hung about him like rags and to him only by the blessing of heaven. But through it all, he carried his thick stick like a gentleman and he looked like a gentleman . . . in distress.

As he approached, he lifted his battered *caubeen* from his head with the air of a prince as he gave them a sort of benison with his grey eyes. He was coming from nowhere and going to the same place, but he looked like a man who was about his Father's business.

"There you have Ireland," said Sheilah. "A king in the coat of a beggar."

"But with a beggar's soul," said Shaun in bitter quickness.

"Not always will it be so," said Sheilah, her grey eyes fixed upon the retreating figure. She looked like a prophetess of old time.

JASPER MORIARTY

But Shaun Brophy's only reply was a sceptical shrug and the closing of one eye.

"Isn't that what Jasper Moriarty is?" he said. "He might be a holy man out of a stained glass windy; he looks like a prince, but he has the soul of the beggar."

"When did he ever beg?" asked Sheilah, a faint flush coming into her cheeks. "Why, even upon your own showing, he never took a penny from you know where."

"But he has the soul of a beggar, all the same," said Shaun stubbornly. "Isn't he always beggin' he and the likes of him? Didn't he beg to head the Viaduct command and isn't he always askin' for things that nobody will give him? And mark what I say—the only people that can give him anything are the people that sent Sergeant Mike MacGuire to him. And they know it, and he knows it. Sure they can give him what Ireland never can—they can give him money and . . ."

"And 'power,' Shaun?"

"Yes, that's the word—'power.' I never trusted that fellow since the day in the house by the Viaduct when he walked out of it all and we in hell."

"But he tried to get into '77,'" she said.

"Did he? He and his '77!" He tried to get out of a blasted trap and to leave the others behind with the teeth closed on them. They do be callin' him Judas and I tell ye he's of the same stuff that sold our Blessed Lord for thirty

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

pieces of silver—only neither silver nor gold will buy Jasper Moriarty.”

“He’s no Judas,” said Sheilah hotly. “It is this mad hate and distrust that’s destroyin’ Ireland—not the English. The day that it goes and Ireland finds her soul, the English will go too, and that without anything from us. Jasper Moriarty has a better record than any man in the movement.”

“Then why didn’t he tell the Centre that MacGuire had approached him?” asked Shaun.

Sheilah was silent. That was the queer thing.

The south-west wind drove in their faces and they without covering. But all the wind and rain of the world could not wash out that suspicion of Jasper Moriarty.

“Why hadn’t he told the Centre?”

CHAPTER XI

THE STUDIO

SHEILAH SHAW lived in a single ground-floor room, set deep behind one of the old Georgian mansions, Ormonde House, with its peeling and broken façade, in a street which had once been the dwelling place of aristocracy, but in the degraded mansions of which the Dublin mob now festered and through the broken doors of which the swarming children scuttled like rats.

A queer place it was, set in between two large public-houses and with a police barracks at the corner. As Sheilah said: "The nearer the barracks, the safer."

It was one of the queerest corners in a city of queer corners with its high skylighted roof and the old tapestries hanging on the walls on which fell a lonely slant of the November sun and, at the end of the long room, the little black fireplace with the brown teapot always on the hob.

Ormonde House was indeed all that had been left Sheilah by her father, Standish Shaw, who had died the year after the Rising. Standish Shaw had been a portrait painter of some repute

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

and it was on the rents of the old house where he had lived with his daughter that the latter existed—more or less and when she could collect them. For indeed, as she said, herself, what she earned by her poetry wouldn't keep the soul in a mouse.

The slender grey-eyed woman, who had just returned from her mission to the West, her smooth brown hair now more thickly shot with grey and coiled low on the neck, looked like one of the Greek goddesses on the tapestried walls come to life as she moved about her studio. There was something virginal about the tiny breasts which, as she moved, trembled under the cobweb-silk of her dress, between them the great uncut emerald which was her only jewel hanging upon its golden hair.

She moved delicately, setting out her cups and saucers and placing a table on the high staging where a certain select circle usually drank their tea and ate their barmbrack—that delectable currant cake of Ireland which tasted so good with butter spread thickly upon it.

Around the walls were the portraits of her father, portraits which he had either not been able to sell or which he wished to keep. For Standish Shaw, with his flowing beard, hawk-like nose and grey eye, had not only been that strange phenomenon, a Protestant rebel, but had preferred to suffer poverty rather than sell certain of his works.

Here was the head of Father Devlin, the rebel priest who had blessed the Rebellion and defied

THE STUDIO

Rome, the eyes blazing out of the parchment face, and just beyond him again the picture of a broken wheel by the side of a gate, and then beyond that again, one of her beloved *Sidhe*, the god-fairies which her friend Peter Carew had painted for her—he that talked with fairies as others talk with mortals.

This was one of Sheilah's "evenings."

The old bell in the corner over the curtains began to swing and then to emit that prolonged and cracked tintinnabulation which always sounded so friendly to the ear, and out she went through the curtains and down the long twisty passage to the right and then to the left and so to the right again—and there was the door.

That was the first arrival—he always did come first. John O'Connor, the one time Trinity professor, hide-bound Tory, poor as two church mice, who lived with his cats and his classics under the roof of the house in Great Brunswick Street, the place with the poverty smell of cats.

He had a wandering eye had Professor John O'Connor, who had been a crony of Standish Shaw and in his day the greatest Greek scholar in Ireland—an eye like that of a boiled codfish as little Merrow, the funny little dear man who would be sitting over against the hob as though he were making a friend of the teapot, would say—though, indeed, it was seldom that he said anything. His coat was shiny with age and in a terrible state from the gravy stains, and the lapels were covered with the snuff on which the

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Professor appeared to live. The little Merrow said that he "ate it with his nose."

"Ah, good evenin', Sheilah," he said in that rather apologetic voice with a "for God's sake" in the heart of it.

Without a word and without shaking hands, he went over to the old armchair with the shiny horsehair which for thirty years had been his invariable resting place and watched the little Merrow on the other side of the fire drawing at his little short clay pipe and looking heart-broken into the glowing coals as was his way, for the little man had followed on the Professor's heels. But he never said anything to him and the Merrow never said anything either. The Merrow very seldom opened his lips from about the stem of his little black clay to say anything to anybody.

"The Merrow," as he was called after those queer little sea-fairies with the crabbed wrinkled faces red noses, and moonshiny eyes that come up from the green depths to sit by the hearthstones of men, would sometimes "make the offer" to speak without the offer materializing. But it might be that there was nothing he did not see.

Another ring and in came the most beautiful man in Ireland—Terence O'Boyle, with his poor clothes, his eye like the blue flame of a sword and his snowy hair, for all his young face, brushed wavily down across his forehead. Terence O'Boyle, "the Sweet Singer of Munster," as he was known from his beautiful mellow tenor with which he sang the songs that he made, the man

THE STUDIO

who the people said had been in love with Sheilah ever since they had been children together—that helpless love of the weak man for the strong woman.

Terence, who kept his soul in his body by playing a fiddle in a cinema orchestra, and playing it badly, had a sweet weak mouth and the jaw of a woman. But he was slender, he had the pallor of the consumptive, and his voice rang like bells.

“Ah, there ye are, are ye!” he greeted the old professor and shuddered as though at the sight of him, although he was fond enough of John O’Connor in the bitter way that was his own. “What have ye got to say against Ireland to-day, professor? Have ye learned anything more from the budding asses at Trinity?”

“Ah, can’t ye be aisy wid yer talk, Terence,” said the old man deprecatingly in the powerful brogue which clothed him as a garment. “You lave me alone and I’ll lave you alone.”

“Did you hear what your Secret Service did to the man they found in the Park this morning with a bucket over his head, his face battered in and two bullets in his chest? Did you read that this morning in the ‘Freeman’?”

“Not *my* Secret Service, Terence,” said the old Tory with his deprecating look. . . . “I don’t stand for those things. I’m a moderate man, a sane man.”

“There’s an alarming amount of sanity in Ireland, Professor,” came the reply, followed by a bitter laugh. “’Tis the thing that’s killing

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Ireland—that always killed it. Grattan and O'Connell and Dillon and now John Redmond—they were all sane men. None of them wanted to break the British connection any more than Professor John O'Connor, so sane and moderate they were.

"There you have the soul of Ireland in a nutshell—a violent spirit in an easy body. . . ." And Terence laughed again, that bitter-sweet laugh, in it the sound of bells.

The old man turned one deprecating eye slightly upwards and outwards as though begging mercy from his youthful opponent, but the only response was a short laugh as Terence O'Boyle pulled out another cigarette from the packet in his pocket and lighted it at the stump of the one hanging from the corner of his mouth, after which he crouched himself into a low chair, fixed his eyes on the glass roof, and appeared to take no further interest in the proceedings.

"I saw Brian and his wife coming up the street, so I left the door open behind me," he muttered, his eyes still fixed on the skylighted roof, after which he was silent.

A little figure that might have been that of a boy but which was really a man ran in. He plunged past Sheilah to press his head into the cushions on the big divan near the fire and to throw both feet into the air like a rabbit going into its burrow.

"Did you hear the latest?" he cried.

It was curious to see how the eyes and faces

THE STUDIO

lighted up as though they were waiting to feed at some lambent flame.

"It's all about our own Clarence. He has a letter in the 'Sniper' to say that only for him the Rising never could have taken place and that the claim of Jasper Moriarty to have landed the gelignite at Bantry Bay is a fraudulent claim and that it was he that defied the British Army and Navy." And young McCracken once more buried his head in the cushions and once more flung up his tail with delight.

"But you don't tell the other side," said Sheilah quietly. "It was Clarence who planned the sniping in the Haddington Road and who single-handed did defy and, what is more, held in check the British Army from his eerie on the top of the gasworks during the Rising. Give the man his due—he's brave enough. . . ."

"And vain enough," came from the armchair where the glowing end of a cigarette showed O'Boyle as he drew the grateful fumes deep down into his riddled lungs, to expel them again in thin air and to cough a little. "When the crowd at the Swords demonstration cheered Carrera as he came on to the platform with the other speakers, didn't our dear friend Clarence Mangan lift his hat in acknowledgment? He thought the cheering was for him."

"Oh, he's the great fun entirely," said McCracken. "Didn't that little red headed *sheveragh* that calls herself a nurse up at FitzWilliam House maternity home, out of pure divilment, for there

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

was no need for it, make him cut off his beautiful brown moustache when he was 'on the run' and he never forgave her—and she hidin' him under the roof for four months unbeknownst to the McConkeys. He said she did it with an ulterior motive."

"By the way," said O'Boyle, "what was the true story about Jasper in the House near the Viaduct? Shaun the Watcher always says he fought like a cageful of wild cats and then disappeared in the middle of it all. Anyhow, he was found at his desk in the 'Sniper' office the morning after the Rising and the Castle was never able to prove anything on him."

"And did you see the letter in 'The Gunman,' that is always sniping the 'Sniper,' headed 'Judas Moriarty?' I bet Murphy the editor himself wrote it. He hates Moriarty and . . ."

He broke off abruptly as a tall figure suddenly appeared in the opening of the curtains, its hands in its pockets. It was the man of whom they had been speaking, who looked quickly around the room and then entered to smile that small sweet smile with acid in the heart of it.

Had he heard anything? Nobody could say, but it seemed as though something queer had entered with him—the uneasiness which always accompanied him.

"Good evening, everybody," he said quietly. "I found the door open when I came in and I left it open behind me." He went slowly over to the low stool opposite the Merrow, the stool

THE STUDIO

on which he usually crouched on Sheilah's evenings, turning his beard over and through his long white fingers, with a caress that had something in it of torture.

There was a sudden inrush of the curtains, the bang of a distant door, and the next moment Brian O'Rourke came through them with a rush, followed by his wife a moment later.

"Did ye hear the latest about Clarence?" greeted him.

"No, and I don't want to," retorted Brian. "Amn't I sick and tired of hearin' about him?"

"Dublin fiddles while Ireland burns," said Moriarty from his seat by the fire.

"Oh, but you're the terrible kill-sport, Jasper Moriarty," said little McCracken. "What's the harm of a piece of fun? Did you hear this about Clarence . . .?"

He was about to plunge into one of the interminable stories about Clarence Mangan, when a man came in through the curtains. He was an enormous man, with an enormous paunch, two great curling moustachios and a pair of the most serious eyes in Dublin, big round blue eyes.

He was Lawrence O'Hara the veterinary surgeon, the licensed wit of the city, the man who turned everything into a joke, commonly known as Larry the Vet.

The Merrow sat at the fireside and as Dr. O'Hara entered, hit a lump of coal on the head as though he were angry at something and sucked at his short pipe.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

“Did ye hear the latest?” began Dr. O’Hara in a solemn voice.

“We don’t want any more ‘latests,’ doctor,” said Brian Boru. “We’ve had all we want from young Mac here.”

“Oh, but this is a serious story and a moral story,” said the doctor, portentously, his big blue eyes staring innocently before him. “It happened to a customer of me own. Ye know Peter Taylof, the little wine merchant in Lant Street, who has just married and he sixty—married the young widow McGuinness.

“Peter is as jealous as a little bantam cock of his new wife, and somebody told him last night that a big blackguard of a man had been tryin’ to make love to her and had even gone into her . . .” he paused a moment, “well, I may as well say it and get it over—into what we may call her sleeping apartment. Well, home runs Peter in a terrible state and as he gets in, without listening to the protestations of his young bride, who was quietly eating her supper downstairs, that she knew nothing about any man except her own dear Peter, he picks up the carving knife and runs upstairs to the bedroom. And there, lo and behold what does he see but a white-faced man in the connubial couch—a big fellow with swollen white cheeks, little eyes and a double chin with a neckcloth round it and a nightcap pulled well down over his head! He takes the knife and plunges it into the white-faced blackguard’s throat, when off falls the nightcap and he finds

THE STUDIO

that some joker had put a fine fat pig in the bed."

There was a great shout of laughter. But Mrs. O'Rourke didn't laugh.

"I think I know who the joker was," said Terence. But the doctor only looked the more grave.

Dr. O'Hara was the funniest man in Ireland. He had a way of turning everything from a corpse to a bridegroom into a joke, a repartee like lightning, and "a way wid him." If he entered a room, everybody waited for the inevitable joke, for the doctor could no more help joking than breathing . . . and people expected it of him and felt a grievance if he did not begin at once. He was a jester, fully licensed, for he made fun of Sinn Feiner and Castle man indiscriminately, had no politics to speak of, and nobody resented anything he said or did. Around him always revolved a band of satellites like the rings of Saturn, deriving their vitality from his jests. And saturnine he was, for the doctor was never known to laugh himself.

"Here's the latest poem by Maddox," he said, pulling a "Banba" from his pocket and glancing slightly at Terence.

"Here is how it goes :

Dark are the shining waters of . . .

"Oh, that fellow!" came the voice from the chair where O'Boyle was lighting another of his interminable cigarettes at the stump of the

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

previous one. "What he calls poetry! It's enough to make a Jew laugh."

"That's what he says about yours, Terence," said O'Hara, innocently.

"I think he writes very well," put in the unfortunate Professor, who looked more like a child that had never grown up than anything else in the world. "That 'Dark Waters' of his was one of the most beautiful things I have read for a long time."

"That of course puts the cap on it," said Terence, bitterly. "Professor O'Connor, the great judge of modern Irish poetry, with weeds hangin' to him."

He subsided into his chair after taking another deep whiff of his cigarette and shut his eyes.

"Oh, if it's of Maddox you're talking, he can't write," said Moriarty acidly as he lit a splendid meerschaum pipe which had found its way from the hand of a drunken sailor into the hand-me-down on the Quay in exchange for an oil-skin. He held it delicately in the very centre of the red lips, biting its amber stem with his sharp white teeth, and puffed at it as though he were smoking shredded gold, for although Jasper Moriarty looked an ascetic, he might have been an æsthete.

Then he added: "Everyone knows where he gets his inspiration—out of the whiskey bottle."

The Merrow said nothing but looked in melancholy fashion from face to face and then subsided hopelessly. But nobody interfered with him.

THE STUDIO

"Peter Carew says he is one of the coming poets, and Yeats too," said Sheilah, speaking almost for the first time.

"That's because they're afraid of him, of course," said Moriarty, ironically. "We're all afraid of one another here in Dublin, but we still go on laughin'. We'd laugh at our own funerals if we could watch them from the coffin."

He added after a moment: "Ireland's the country where people feed on their own flesh with laughter as the sauce."

"Well, the two men you mention I believe are about the only two of them all that are not afraid of anybody," said Professor O'Connor. "Thank God!" he spluttered with a militancy unsuspected, "we have wan or two fearless wans and the shadow of a public opinion—but only the shadow."

"I think the Professor is right," said Sheilah in her low deep voice.

"We're not talking about those two," said young McCracken. "And what good are they and their friends, anyhow? When did these fearless ones of the Professor ever show their fearlessness with the gun in the Republican ranks? Aren't they all for compromise and against the gun? . . . And what's the good of a public opinion that goes with England?" he asked with triumphal illogicality.

"I go farther," he went on. "I say that no man, whatever he has written or done or said in the past, who has compromised on the question

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

of separation, has ever been a good Irishman, or, for that matter, an Irishman at all."

"And talkin' about Maddox," put in Terence O'Boyle, dragging the conversation back to his pet horror, "he and his patriotism—what did he ever do, I'd like to ask?"

"Well, he hid Shaun the Watcher that time when the 'G's' were after him," said Moriarty quietly. "And that's more than some of you did." He laughed a little laugh that was strangled at birth.

"Well, what did you do, I'd like to know?" retorted Terence, surprised into anger.

"I didn't hide myself in my little cinema theatre anyhow," said Jasper, coolly, taking his meerschaum out of his lips as he said it, and then replacing it after polishing its tawny surface with the shiny sleeve of his serge jacket.

Terence O'Boyle came bolt upright in his chair as though he had been galvanized, and even Dr. O'Hara who was telling one of his funny stories in the corner, was suddenly silent.

"Where was Jasper Moriarty at the end of the fight in the House by the Viaduct?" he asked with a sneer on the rather sickly clean-shaven mouth.

Jasper stole a look at him like a man caught in a murder, expelled a great cloud of smoke, and then said as though he had been running:

"I tried to get into '77' and I failed." His face was so terrible that even Terence O'Boyle kept silent.

THE STUDIO

“Isn’t it queer that no Irishman can ever give credit to any other Irishman?” inserted Brian Boru. “We have the reputation for being the most generous people in the world—God help us! But whenever one of us does raise himself a bit over his fellows for the credit of Ireland, everybody unites in pulling him down. ’Tis the only thing that unites us I’m thinkin’.”

“Ah, he’s jealous that he didn’t get the Viaduct Command,” said Terence with a last vicious jerk into consciousness and again subsiding.

Jasper Moriarty looked at him again. There was a sort of hateful pregnancy in the air.

Brian Boru however glided smoothly into the breach. “What we want in Ireland is not human nature but human reasonableness,” he said. “Of human nature we’ve plenty and to spare. Why can’t we give credit where credit is due? instead of which we tear at one another’s breasts and when we have done that we tear at our own—feed on our own flesh as Jasper said a while ago. Why, we’re worse than cannibals who at least don’t feed on their own flesh but on other people’s—and who devour not their friends but their enemies. ’Tis sweet sanity and human reasonableness we want. God knows it is not that we are inhuman, but un-human.

“Sure if it wasn’t that some of us have enough reasonableness to carry us over an hour or two, would we be able to meet here at Sheilah’s evenings? Isn’t the Professor there a Tory and

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

haven't we every shade of opinion here from sea green to red, white and blue ? ”

“ To hell with reasonableness ! ” ejaculated young McCracken with a laugh—but a laugh with a sting in the tail of it.

“ Ye have it, Jimmy ! ” said O'Boyle approvingly. “ I tell ye, as I told the Professor there before Brian came in that it is that very ‘ human reasonableness ’ that has always kept Ireland from coming to her own. Aren't we dyin' from reasonableness and compromise ? Isn't it because England knows that there is more compromise in Ireland than anywhere else in Europe that she keeps putting forward all her own schemes of ‘ sweet reasonableness,’ which have one end—to come into the blasted British Empire ? Tell me that.” And Terence fell back upon his cigarette.

“ Listen to him ! ” said Jasper in a sort of ecstasy. “ Did you ever know the Irishman that couldn't make black white and white black and aren't both Brian Boru and Terence O'Boyle both right ? The thing that has destroyed all Irishmen is the capacity to see every problem from a hundred facets—just as the gods see it. And of course it is compromise that has eaten up Ireland like a cancer. I often wish to God we could have the quality of the Englishman who owes his success to being able to see only one thing at a time, and that only half, and with it his capacity to exist upon a smaller expenditure of vitality than any other thing on God's earth except a tortoise.”

THE STUDIO

Mrs. O'Rourke was looking at her husband with those great staring eyes of hers, her hands sunk nattily into the side pockets of the little jacket she had kept on.

"That's the way me wife talks," said Brian ruefully, as he caught her eyes upon him. "She's against all compromise, like all the colleens. But as I'm always tellin' the boys, the day will come when we'll have to meet our enemies over the arbitration table. We need statesmen as well as fighters."

"On what do you want to compromise, Brian—on the Republic?" asked his girl-wife. There was something of menace in the calm all-embracing gaze of those big golden eyes set in the frame of the dark red hair, that coiled about her head. There was the suggestion of force underneath, as when a sulky swell lifts itself heavily from an oily sea, with underneath it the scend of heavy seas coming up behind.

"Ah, there she goes again!" said her husband in a voice that brought a roar of laughter from the others, who forgot for the moment their hidden animosities.

"As if any of us would ever compromise or anyhow want to compromise on the Republic," said Brian, but in a voice neither so easy nor so certain as usual. He smiled a little, a queer little, wry smile.

"She's always talkin' like that," he went on jocosely. "Sure didn't I catch her talkin' that

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

way to little Kathleen this morning and she not three years yet ! ”

There was another crackle of laughter.

But Mrs. Brian Boru did not laugh. Keeping her great orbs on her husband, she said, still with that suggestion of force reserved :

“ For if ye mean what you call ‘ sweet sanity ’ about the Irish Republic, and if you’d go back on that, I’d rather see you in your coffin, Brian, than at the dissecting table they call the arbitration table, with the corpse of Ireland on it.”

The others had stopped laughing.

Sheilah shivered a little. “ It is very cold for early November,” she said, putting some coal on the fire.

CHAPTER XII

THE HOUSE ON THE QUAY

MOLLY MORIARTY was doing her best to sell a broken set of "The Lives of the Saints" to a crusty old customer, who, in the watery flashes of the spring sun, had been picking and prowling amongst the oilskins and brasses and books of the little hand-me-down on the quay.

As she was also at the same time and in the intervals of argument trying to clean the greens for Jasper's dinner and to keep the two youngest from falling into the fire and to wonder what it could be that was throublin' Jasper now, she had her hands full.

For Honora Moriarty, who might have helped her under more favorable circumstances, but who sat in the corner of the shop, her hands folded in her lap, "was in wan of her dreamin' fits," and could therefore no more be awakened to the realities of life than a woman in a trance.

"And who'd expect it of her—wasn't it just lovely to have the presence of her there—a holy woman with a blessing?"

The neat quiet little woman would take a pat

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

at her comely hair in the little troubled way that she had, as she looked every now and then at the father of her brood, where he was speaking earnestly to Miss Sheilah Shaw just inside the door of the little back parlour. "But you'd think to look at them that it was batin' one another they were and they the best friends in the world this ten years. But it was he that was the quare man and who would be fathomin' him?"

Molly looked again at her husband and then at a suit of grey oil-skins dangling by the door like a man that was hanged. They were the colour of Jasper's face and he after a long night's work on the "Sniper." "Ah, why couldn't they be all aisy about Ireland and not be makin' trouble and the house raided already four times by the soldiers and police and half the books destroyed!

"What was all this talk about Ireland anyhow? Hadn't she heard it since she was a little child and hadn't she heard it again when she married Jasper Moriarty—and he eatin' his heart out for Ireland and for his work and for all the things he couldn't have and couldn't be. Why couldn't he be the aisy man widout ambitions—and they the curse of Ireland? Why couldn't he be like his sister Honora there overright her and she the holy woman and not botherin' the beautiful head of her about politics?"

Molly gave up the insoluble problem for the thousandth time and turned to her difficult

THE HOUSE ON THE QUAY

customer who couldn't it seemed, make up his mind.

"Molly, for Christ's sake keep the childer out of the room while I'm talkin' to Miss Shaw! Why can't you help her, Honora, instead of sittin' there like a woman in a fit?"

"There you had him now. A terrible in-burning temper like a quick-bed of lime and as far from his childer as if they did not exist and he hadn't put them into this dirty world. And even beginnin' to say the hard things to his sister Honora that he loved better than his own wife. But what was the good of arguin' wid him? Better get the childer out of the room."

As his wife entered the little back parlour to shoo the children out as though they had been a clutch of chickens, it was to see her husband looking out on the tiny back yard of the Dublin back block, his face grey from the work of the night and the pale eyes sunken in their dark shadows. Behind him, stood Sheilah, carrying in her arms little Patsy, the latest of the Moriarty clan, who nuzzled vainly at the small rounded breasts and whom she had taken from his mother when she went to serve out holiness to insurgent book collectors.

The queer fancy came to her again that as Shaun the Watcher, his friend, once said, the man at the window looked more than ever like a saint in the altar window of the Pro-Cathedral with Sheilah Shaw and little Patseen like the Virgin and Child. "Maybe 'twasn't right to

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

have them ideas," she thought as she went back to the "Lives," whilst she waited for the customer to make up his mind. "Maybe 'twas the great sin. But often, indeed, she said it was like being married to a saint of heaven when she would be lookin' at the pale serious face of her man across the table or by her side in the bed in the grey dawn . . . only that she knew he was very much of a man, too, passionate and angry and demanding. And sure there were the childer—you couldn't get over that."

"God damn it! Sheilah!" said the man turning suddenly upon her as his little wife went out of the room, "put down that blasted brat! Aren't I riled mad with the children here. My God! what an existence."

"Be quiet, Jasper!" she said quietly, "and Molly out there and she the best wife in the world."

"'Best wife!' indeed!" Jasper Moriarty laughed mirthlessly. "And she givin' me a child every year and knowin' no more about me than any stranger passing the door. I'm not the first that married a pretty face when I was young and foolish and before I knew meself and what was in me."

"Sure, isn't that what we've been talkin' about, Jasper? Don't I tell you that it is ambition that is driving you into something the end of which you cannot see, like a tortured man with his eyes put out? And you, for all your talk about love, that won't give me your confidence."

THE HOUSE ON THE QUAY

“What confidence is there to give? Haven’t I told you that I’ve never taken a halfpenny of blood-money and don’t I tell you that I never will take it—for all that they call me Judas Iscariot Moriarty.” And he laughed a little again, the red lips drawing themselves back from the even white teeth.

“Sure, don’t I know they suspect me?” he went on. “Do ye think I don’t know why the Centre recalled me from the West and I gatherin’ the best of informations as they admitted? Don’t they know I’m well in with the Castle authorities and they hopin’ to get hold of me?”

“That is just the trouble,” said Sheilah as she rocked little Patsy in her arms to soothe his whimpering. “The Centre are afraid that you’ll go the same way as young Lorgan—the boy we all said would be the first to shed his blood for Ireland—and after the Rising he in Dublin Castle decoding the secret cipher to send his comrades to the gallows. ’Tis always like that—the men that say they’ll die for Ireland are sometimes the first to sell Ireland. The false Ireland breeds traitors as beggars breed lice, and as the true Ireland breeds saints.”

“Well, young Lorgan didn’t live long to enjoy his money, did he?” sneered Jasper. “And if it comes to that, who was it that helped to plant him in the Galway bog? Haven’t I proved I am to be trusted? Tell me that. . . .”

She broke him off quickly, taking one hand from the child to do so.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"Hush!" she said. "Even Dublin's walls have ears."

"Well, an' I won't be quiet," he went on as though something were driving at him from underneath—something that would not be denied. "I've been quiet too long. By God! there are times when I'd like to wash my hands of the whole dirty mess. . . ."

". . . and sell out, Jasper?" the woman had said quietly as she crooned over the little child in her arms.

"No, not sell out. Money can't buy me, Sheilah, and well you know it."

"But I know what could, Jasper. Power.

"Power I tell you was the thing for which Judas sold the Saviour, not money. The thirty pieces were but to seal the bond, taken reluctantly. Judas was an ambitious, not a greedy man."

Jasper Moriarty looked stedfastly at her, his head sunk a little, his hands deep in his pockets and clawing at a few coppers. Then he broke out:

"And you're like all the rest. Why, already you think of me as 'Judas.' Give a dog a bad name. Haven't I the bad name ever since I was the height of the table there—I that never did harm to man, woman, or child—only to myself."

He spoke with an intense bitterness and with an intense conviction. It seemed as though something that had been fermenting inside him for

THE HOUSE ON THE QUAY

years was struggling to find outlet. There came to the woman before him a great relief.

"I know that you are speaking the truth, Jasper," she said in that low crooning voice—the voice she had been using to the little child. "It is not I that call you 'Judas,' but it is the things that you do, or don't do, that make people think. I know, none better, that we Irish are always suspicious, that we suck suspicion in with our mother's milk. It was your confidence I wanted, it was not that I suspected you.

"But if you won't give me your confidence, Jasper, I won't force it. Twice have I risked me life to get it. Once, down there in Ennis, and now here, and I, maybe, like some of the others, shadowed, for no one of us trusts anybody else . . . not really and steadily."

"Aye, Sheilah!" and the man had turned to her in a sort of cold frenzy as though her last words had released something that had been working in him. "'Trust.' That's the word. Which of us trusts the other?"

"I'll speak out, be God! if all Dublin hears me and they were me last words."

The woman before him made another half-hearted attempt to stop him. But she dropped the hand which she had raised. There were things that were unstoppable as fate. Jasper Moriarty in that moment was one of them.

She strained little Patsy to her breast as though she would strain him into her, and the proud head bent down to the body of the little child. From

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

outside came Molly's voice, now aspersive as she argued with her customer. The slender figure before him swayed a little in that dark room as though the burden in her arms were too heavy to be borne.

At that moment, they heard voices outside the door, which opened, and there stood Maggie McCann with Mrs Moriarty behind her.

"Oh, Maggie has just come in with her latest song and she's had another dream—a sort of vision—and it is herself that has seen the queer things in it," said Mrs. Moriarty. "It is a great song entirely and she wants us to sell it for her in the window. It is called 'The old Green Flag.'"

"It is the latest of me effusions," said Miss McCann, all a-flutter, and seemingly incapable of thinking of anything else. "Perhaps you would like to hear how it goes. . . ."

She was about to launch herself into it when Sheilah, still holding little Patsy in her arms, collapsed upon a chair to laugh helplessly. Jasper Moriarty looked at her a moment and then turned away to stare out into the little back yard.

CHAPTER XIII

MATERNITY

ANOTHER spring had come and gone and yet another. Mrs. McConkey moved about amongst her plants, snipping a bit here and pinching off a bud there as though they had been the nurses of whom she was thinking at that moment.

“You know, Tom,” she said to her husband, as she stooped over a thriving shoot of verbena in a pot, and she with her virginal face might have been the Blessed Mother herself tending the flowers in a corner of Paradise—“you know, Tom, the home is doing all right now that we’ve got the connection and those maternity people up there above us giving up the battle and they with no chance against our fees and they feeding their nurses like fighting cocks, and I think the time has come to give the go-by to the Sinn Feiners. We’ve Mrs. Hickey coming in for her sixth confinement in eight years and Mrs. Murphy for her ninth. And there is General O’Banion’s wife, for all she said she was through with children after she got her first, coming in again and she upstairs howling mad. ‘Birth control,’ Tom,

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

doesn't always work," she said viciously as she snipped the heart out of a cactus.

Mr. McConkey, sitting in his wheel chair with the crutches resting comfortably by his side in the Good Friday sun like a great pink baby—an enormously imposing pink baby with his high white forehead running back into the shining space above, let one of his wheezy laughs out of him.

"He-he-he!" he wheezed, "let 'em howl—it's good for trade! They and their new fangled notions and interferin' with the ways of God. Why, they've tried to change the sun over there in England—they have what they call 'summer-time.' God's time is good enough for me. But I always did say the English were heathens and in a way, we of the North have as little widgeon them as widgeon the Irish. And where'd we be if birth-control came in as a habit?" he asked inconsequently. "FitzWilliam House might as well shut up shop. Not that I believe it is any good," he added.

"Hush! Don't be speaking about those things, Tom," said Mrs. McConkey, highly shocked. "Here comes Cynthia."

It was typical of the McConkey mind that although the business of the McConkeys and the business of their daughter was to bring children into the world, they would rather have died than gone into details about such an immoral thing as birth-control—for, to them, there was something highly immoral and even unnatural about

MATERNITY

birth as a whole. It was tacitly understood that birth, like life, was still wrapped in mystery, and, indeed, after Cynthia McConkey, as she was before her marriage, had taken her first course in obstetrics, there was a half-hearted attempt to keep up the fiction that she had come out of a parsley bed. However, that had finally been relinquished in the interests of science.

Miss Cynthia entered the room with all the marks of her profession upon the waterproof apron which she wore.

"Thank God! that's over. I thought it was black plumes for her and I with three more expected to-night or to-morrow morning."

"That was the third floor back," said Mrs. McConkey, who invariably referred to the patients by their location rather than by name. "Well, she made enough fuss about it, anyhow." The thin lips pursed in quiet disapproval.

"Calling on her blessed Saint Francis to help her," said Cynthia shutting her mouth tightly together. "It is too bad that we have to take in Papists and we a Protestant home. But there you are. And Paptist money looks the same as Protestant to me."

"Yes, and they're a bit more free with it," said Mr. McConkey shaking his head cunningly from side to side. "Look at that McClusky woman from Belfast. Look at the way she drives her bargain wid ye, Cynthia, every time she comes here, and she for the eleventh time, sayin' she's a regular customer."

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"Well, the North was always hard," said Miss Cynthia resignedly. "You ought to know them, father, and you from the right part of Tyrone with an Orangeman father."

"Oh, 'tis well I know them," said Mr. McConkey. And then, with that devastating illogicality of Ireland: "... and give me the Southern Papist any day of the week. As the man said: heaven for climate but hell for company, and we all know where the Papists go."

"Stop that, Tom!" said Mrs. McConkey in high disapproval. "Stick to your own and your own will stick to you . . . but that reminds me, Cynthia. Your father and I were talking about FitzWilliam House and how well it was doing and couldn't we give the Sinn Feiners the go-by. Isn't it a scandal with all that flock of ravens on the doorstep all hours of the day and night—and didn't General O'Banion himself meet that black Jesuit, Father Halloran, on the step as he came out and didn't I think he'd give him the look as black as his coat and didn't they stand talking together for half an hour as thick as thieves? Oh, but it is a queer world."

"There ye have it now," said Mr. McConkey as he lit his big drooping briar, drawing in the fumes as though he were eating the smoke until the tears of contentment ran down his soft smooth face. "Ye never know where ye stand in Ireland. There's no principle down here in the South, where Ulstermen and Papists live together as happy as doves and where I'm bound to say the

MATERNITY

Papists elect the Protestant to the leading positions, with the Protestants, bad cess to them! doing the same in return. 'Tis only up in the North that we know how to keep the flag flying and to keep religion. For 'tis there we say that the only good Catholic is a dead Catholic and, faith! we make many a good Catholic on the Twelfth of immortal memory." The nominal head of the McConkeys laughed in delight as at old and pleasant memories. But the actual head did not laugh. Instead, she turned to her daughter:

"Get the Papists out of FitzWilliam House, Cynthia, as soon as you can and you'll have done a good day's work."

"That's the way to talk, Chrissy," said her consort approvingly.

But Miss Cynthia, for all her own irreconcilableness, pursed her lips up tight.

"You don't know what you're talking about, father," she said. "You leave me to manage my own business. If it weren't for the Papists, we might as well put up the shutters to-morrow. The Papists are very prolific. Isn't Mrs. Murphy upstairs, waiting for her ninth, and twinses twice running, as good as a life annuity itself?"

"Well, Cynthia," said her progenitor mildly, "I don't want to interfere with the business, especially with those other people above us laying themselves out for a Sinn Fein connection and they Protestants like ourselves. But, with Mrs. O'Rourke in for the third, we'll be havin' Brian Boru the wild Irishman about the house again and it

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

gives us a bad name and he a minister of the Irish Republic—the Irish Republic ! ” He laughed the same old wheezing laugh as he blew the smoke down through his nostrils and coughed it out of his lungs.

“ Sure didn’t the Reverend McTaggart, the Presbyterian minister, meet Father Halloran on the stairs the other day and didn’t they talk like two old friends for ten minutes and up in the North, isn’t it only on the Twelfth of July that the Catholics and the Orangemen fight—don’t they even be lendin’ one another their horses and carts and laborers at other times ! Things are not what they were—there’s no religion these times,” said the old irreconcilable despairingly as he drew in great draughts from his big briar pipe.

“ Now listen to that woman groaning,” said Mr. McConkey philosophically. “ She’s been at it ever since the early morning and I not able to get a wink of sleep.”

“ Let her groan,” said Miss Cynthia with fine detachment. “ It’ll do her good. But the trouble they make of it . . .

“ Oh, there’s the doctor as sure as Billy ! ” she broke off, rushing away to change her apron and to prepare for Mrs. Mooney, now groaning like a lost soul, whilst she called down the hall to the Cubby Hole : “ Are those instruments ready ? ”

The woman who said that, had been on her feet almost uninterruptedly for forty-eight hours.

MATERNITY

She had in that time saved the life of at least one woman before the doctor had had time to come over. She lived the life of a dozen slaves, and she had no prospect of doing anything else in this world, and, for all she knew, for her ideas of heaven were hazy, in the world to come. She had sacrificed her young life with it and the hope of man and child of her own, for she had long since ceased to care for the man who had run away from her on her wedding night—but she said: “Let her groan!”

Mysterious indeed are the ways of God!

Downstairs in the “Cubby Hole,” the little room behind the stairs at the end of the hall where they went down to the kitchen and which acted as a sort of surgery, there was the cold gleam of instruments and the bubbling of enamelled dishes upon the gas-flames. Two waterproof sheets, all bloody, lay in the corner where they had been thrown an hour before. On a small chair in the corner Nurse Donovan was drinking a cup of tea and gulping rapidly pieces of bread and butter, which she hastily threw down the lavatory as she heard her tyrant come along the hall. The cup she pushed under a waterproof.

“My God! Miss McCann,” she said to her companion, Maggie McCann, who, having nothing better to do, had drifted into FitzWilliam House for a talk and a cup of tea, “My God! the fright she gev’ me!” as Miss Cynthia went past the door and down into the kitchen. “And for the

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

love of heaven listen to that Mooney woman. You'd think she had ten thousand devils tearin' at her."

Little nurse McTavish from Belfast ran in with a copy of the "Sniper" to ask excitedly: "Can anybody give me a tip for the Derby? Here's a list of some of the possible runners here in the 'Sniper.' Kathleen's boy says that Electra with Geary up has a good chance."

"Ah, don't be tellin' me," said Miss McCann. "I'll give you a tip that's worth while. Back the Shaugraun for all you're worth—put your chemise on him. Sure haven't I it better even than straight from the horse's mouth—haven't I if from heaven itself if it comes to that, for didn't me fine Saint Cecilia come to me in a vision to whisper 'The Shaugraun,' and it ringin' in me ears when I woke up. Put a pound on him, nurse, for the love of God—do now," she said coaxingly.

"Indeed an' I won't," responded the little sandy faced nurse with some acerbity. "Didn't I put me fine five bob on 'The Runaway Boy' for Punchestown after you said you had it from Saint Francis, and I a Protestant, and didn't he come in last?"

"Well, don't be askin' me for tips any more," said Maggie McCann in high dudgeon.

"For my part," said nurse Donovan, "I think you'd better go up and ask Moira O'Rourke—they do be sayin' 'tis lucky to take a tip from a red-haired woman expectin'."

"I know a luckier," replied the little Ulster-

MATERNITY

woman. "Isn't Mrs. Moriarty just goin' to have her seventh down there on the quay? And isn't anything you get from a woman lying for her seventh the luckiest thing of all? Didn't Norah Dooley win the second prize in the Sisters of Mercy's raffle last year by letting a woman with seven children dip her hand in the lucky bag?"

"If ye want luck, you won't be goin' to Moira O'Rourke," said nurse Donovan. "There's not much luck about Brian Boru and his wife these times—and the two of them fightin' together like wild cats. You ought to have heard them goin' on when he came to visit her yesterday and I standin' outside the door and it ajar."

"What was that, nurse?" asked Maggie McCann eagerly. "Tell us all about it." She settled herself down to enjoy a real good back-talk.

"She was reproaching him with having in his heart of hearts given up the idea of keeping the Republic and with going over to the peace at any price men and with being ambitious. She told him he was in the pay of the Castle and Ireland dyin' under the heels of the soldiers and peelers. But that was after he had talked to her about negociation and she wild mad and so she finished up by calling him another Jasper Moriarty."

"Ah, that's the talk to give him," said Miss McCann with extreme unction. "And what is he but a Judas?"

"Is it true that none of the Sinn Feiners trust

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

one another?" asked nurse McTavish with a certain insinuating innocence. "They say that Jasper Moriarty is in the Castle pay. But of course I'm from the Black North and I know nothing about it," and she tittered unpleasantly.

"And indeed it would be well for you and the likes of you if you had men half as good as Jasper Moriarty and Brian Boru," said nurse Donovan in concentrated insult. "What are you all up there in Ulster but a lot of skin-the-goats!"

"Thru for you, alannah," said Maggie joining forces against the common enemy. "If it wasn't for those dirty Proddies up there in Ulster, sure wouldn't Ireland be free this hundred years? A dirty lot of traitors."

Little nurse McTavish's eyes flashed fire.

"Wait," she said, "wait until we have to tame ye once more and play 'Croppies lie down!' over your graves. 'Tis not that we trust the English—sure don't we know they are all as treacherous as a forest of tigers, and it isn't that we trust the English statesmen any more than we trust hell or Lloyd George, but we can handle our own affairs ourselves and we can put the fear of Billy into you Papists when the time comes. Put that in your pipes and smoke it!" she concluded venomously as she ran out of the room before they could come with their *riposte*.

"Well, did ye ever hear the likes o' that?" asked nurse Donovan staring at the white face of the door which nurse McTavish had slammed in her passage.

MATERNITY

"But about Jasper Moriarty, now?" asked her friend, wheedling. "Tell us all about it. Is it true what they are sayin' or isn't it?" The grey eyes glistened in prospect of juicy revelations.

"Some say it is and some say it isn't," replied the nurse, sententiously. . . . "Christ! how I'd like to tear that McTavish woman!" she broke off as the memory of her wrongs came upon her and she not allowed to reply.

"Now, don't be mindin' that sandy headed viper," said Maggie pleasantly, letting her curiosity overcome her annoyance. "But tell me more about Jasper."

"Nobody knows what to believe," answered her friend. "He looks like a plaster idol and there's no trustin' that sort . . . but if I can only get me claws in the scruff of that woman's neck," she said viciously as the memory of her wrongs once more overcame her. . . .

"I'm sure he's a traitor," said Maggie McCann decisively. "And what's more, I wouldn't be surprised if Brian Boru himself wasn't another."

"Just listen to that Mooney woman," said nurse Donovan throwing her eyes up as a deep groan came to their ears.

"Ah, but it isn't easy," said Maggie. "I wouldn't go through it for any man on earth, and 'tis well they know it, glory be to God!"

"But I thought you were engaged, Miss McCann, and looking forward to a visit to Fitz-William House," said nurse Donovan, maliciously

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

“And do ye think I’d marry a traitor?” asked Miss McCann acidly. “Didn’t he go in with that dirty traitor, Brian Boru, and haven’t the Cumann na mBan excommunicated him? Sure isn’t his own wife against him and she herself one of the Cumann?”

“Well, I know nothing about the League of the Women—I couldn’t even spell it in the Irish. But if the women of Ireland go one way and their men the other, what is going to happen to Ireland? . . . God! look at that dam gas blaze and the things boiling over into it! If the McConkeys only get the smell, I’m done.” She rushed over to take the dish off the spluttering flame.

“What’s goin’ to happen to Ireland?” she asked argumentatively, as she turned over a formidable pair of forceps in the boiling water.

“We don’t want traitors to save Ireland,” said Maggie McCann, and then, after a moment, reflectively: “I only hope that you’re not a traitor, too, nurse Donovan?” She appeared to be reflecting, and then added: “Did ye ever hear my last verses about the dirty Traitor Chiefs?”

Nurse Donovan forgot the tongs, the insult, and the impending coming of life into an already overburdened world and turned with eager glistening eyes to her friend.

“Rise it, Miss McCann,” she said.

Without further ado, Maggie broke into the

MATERNITY

following ; announcing the title with a certain seriousness :

“ The Traitor Chiefs !

The men who sold old Ireland are traitors all
galore,
We'll hang them high as Haman upon the green
green shore,
And when they're dead and done with and free-
dom's on the seas,
You'll see the golden Sunburst waving in the
breeze.

“ There's twenty-two verses in all, nurse,”
said Miss McCann complacently. “ Would you
like to hear some more ? ”

“ Faith I haven't time now, for there's that
she-devil, worse luck ! coming up the stairs again.
But I thought I heard those last two lines before.
Where was it ? ”

“ Oh, I often use them,” said Miss McCann,
still more complacently. “ They go so well with
every sort of poetry.” (She pronounced it
“ *potery*.”)

“ Glory be to God ! but there goes the water
again into the gas. Oh, my God ! why was I ever
born to be a maternity nurse ? ” asked nurse
Donovan. “ If she catches this, and don't I
hear her on the stairs this minute, she'll have the
heart out of me.”

“ Are the instruments ready ? ” said a chilly
voice in the doorway.

CHAPTER XIV

HUSBAND AND WIFE

UPSTAIRS in the first floor back, Moira O'Rourke, once more heavy with child, awaited her husband.

The heavy figure, still with that suggestion of slenderness, moved up and down as she gazed out over the stone walls of Dublin crowned by their soft scented wallflowers. The scent came heavily to her nostrils as she looked across them—the scent that was always associated in her mind with childbirth.

Brian had been more and more away from home, chiefly in the West and “on the run” from England's plain-clothes men. For months together, she with her children hardly saw him. Like tens of thousands of her countrywomen in this year of 1921 when “the Terror” was on the land, from whom Ireland took their men as she took all, she lived a more or less solitary life, punctuated only by raids of the police and soldiers.

As she moved, she thought of that night a couple of weeks before when she and her man had been saved by the coolness and courage of little Kathleen, who, four years old, and awakened from her

HUSBAND AND WIFE

sleep by the midnight raiders, had let her mother strap to her little body the two flat magazine pistols and the papers which meant life and death. She had walked out bravely before the searchers, who, not wishing to frighten a little child, had let her pass out through the door with her precious freight.

Well, 'twas the will of God, but Ireland took everything, everything of hope and love and strength—even the little children. And what kind of a life was it for the children to be growing up in with raids and terror and wretchedness? It wouldn't matter if Ireland had been united, but there were the women of the Cumann na mBan, that League of the Women that fed the guns with the ammunition which they carried under their petticoats as they carried the propaganda, the League that was the heart of Ireland. And there were their men-folk, already fainthearted, sometimes laughing at the ways of the *colleens*, ready to compromise, with ambition and tiredness and fear pulling at the heart-strings of them.

Her eyes, as she thought on these things, went to the other side of the street to the tall woman who was passing in sandalled feet, draped in black from head to foot and with the widow's veil on her head and falling back over her shoulders. That was Iseult Lemoine, still of a rare grace, but all her beauty spent, as she had spent all for Ireland, the bloodsucker.

There she moved, a shadow, through the

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Dublin streets like hundreds of other shadows, with all the joy of life sucked out of her and she still in the body. She had given fortune and husband and her own flesh and blood—and for what? To be lied about and abused, and her only son Patrick killed in a raid and her husband not yet eaten by the quicklime of Mountjoy and he with half a dozen bullets in him.

There you had Ireland, faithless and deadly as a leech.

There was Jasper Moriarty—there were a hundred Jasper Moriartys if it came to that—and he hating everything and everybody, hating England but a little less than those of his own. And Sheilah Shaw, wearing out the remnants of her youth and life for a dying cause. And there was Ulster, the implacable, used as the stalking horse by cunning statesmen on the other side of the Irish Sea. Canny Ulster, Irish of the Irish though she did not know it herself, in a way warm, generous Ulster, herself distrusting England but ready to die for the Empire in which England didn't believe, being used as a catspaw and using those others as catspaws.

What was the use of it all? What was life and Ireland anyhow, but one great spiritual muddle with nobody understanding anybody else—nobody whole-hearted—nobody trusting?

“Nobody trusting.” Yes, that was the trouble. It was easy for a woman to see the clear road and the straight road. Ireland wanted a Republic and had declared a Republic at the time of the

HUSBAND AND WIFE

Rising because she wanted to be free from the British Empire—out of the Empire. But what was it the men of Ireland wanted?

And why did she want to be out of the Empire?

Because she had a different goal in life and in death.

For the first time in her life, Moira saw what to her seemed the truth written in letters of fire across the retina of her brain.

Thousands had died and perhaps would die for Ireland who had never realized that. But she had realized it, and for the first time. Behind that difference lay deeper differences—differences going far outside either England or Ireland, spiritual chasms that could never be bridged in time, though maybe in eternity, for all, Irish and English, were made by the same Hand.

Who was it that had written that the Irishman's heaven would be the Englishman's hell and the Englishman's heaven the Irishman's hell? He was the wise man.

But, again—what was it that the men wanted? Nothing but diplomacy and compromise.

But did Ireland want the Republic? Father Francis, the fiery Franciscan, said she did. The Cumann na mBan said that she did. But did she?

What about that "great inert mass" of which young MacDonagh, going to his death under the guns of England, had spoken? What about the masses of little hucksters and traders, ready to

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

sell their souls for halfpence—and some of the little, and, for that matter, some of the big farmers of the West ready sometimes to shoot their mothers for another square yard of Irish soil? Well, if it came to that, wasn't the soil life and death for them itself?

That was always the way. Whatever side you took or whatever side you were on, you always had the easy reason for it in Ireland.

Wasn't the whole story of Ireland for three hundred years and more a long story of men who didn't know their own minds, of men ready to compromise? Wasn't compromise the curse of the facile Celt who could see every side? Hadn't the man with the clearest cleverest brain in Ireland, Jasper Moriarty, the most conscious of them all, said it that evening nearly two years before in Sheilah's studio? Grattan and O'Connell and Redmond and all the others—hadn't they all been compromisers?

Which one of them had said: "We want separation from England and God helping us we will have it?" Which of them had said this or seen this? Was not Ireland the most unconscious nation in the world? Wasn't hers almost a boastful unconsciousness?

Well, Mitchel and Wolfe Tone and the '48'ers had seen it. But how many? A handful.

What did all that mean? Didn't it mean that they were all suffering from illusions—from the illusion that Irishmen in the mass were panting for freedom—a lie?

HUSBAND AND WIFE

Yet there was a little Ireland that panted for it. There were the tiny spiritual minority that were the heart-beat of the Gael that understood. There was an Ireland that always understood—Ireland herself, apart from her people? Was that what she meant?

Was it going mad that she was? This was metaphysics or whatever they called things you felt but could not prove.

Yet if she went on thinking that only a tiny handful wanted freedom and understood what they meant by it, she would be falling into her husband's trap—the trap of compromise through realization and disgust.

Look at Brian now—wasn't Brian the most whole-souled of them all at the start? Hadn't he sworn in that very room on her first unborn child that he would never go back on the Republic, and hadn't he renewed the promise that evening when she had challenged him in Sheilah's studio, and weren't he and the others ready now to go back on it—to compromise—to enter into a Treaty? A Treaty for what and with whom?

She pressed her hands together in her agony as she heard the step that she knew so well outside the door. It was Brian.

But it wasn't the Brian who had run in with the sweep and rush of the north-west wind of four years ago. It was a man worn pale with care and calculation. It was the Brian who was like a stranger in her house and bed.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"Well, Moira, here I am," he said, a little awkwardly. "It wasn't easy for me to get here and I passed half a dozen 'G' men on the road but they didn't interfere with me."

"And why didn't they, Brian?" she asked.

"I don't know," he replied, still awkward, and a wave of colour ran across his face. "I suppose they knew I had two of the best strapped inside me trousers and with Shaun shadowing me behind. I suppose they wouldn't take any chances."

"It wasn't that, Brian," she said, almost inaudible.

"You know why it was. They know that you and your friends are ready to treat. They have their orders not to lay a hand on you. You are doing the work they want. You are walking into the trap—you that they once called 'Brian Boru.'"

"Ah, that's the way you always talk, Moira," said her husband. "What's the use of goin' on with this fightin' and they knockin' hell out of us? Can't ye see as plain as daylight that we have no chance against England in the open field? It is only a question of time for her to smash us. Let us stand out from under before it's too late and get what we can."

"And give up the agony of seven years, Brian? No, never! Where is all the talk ye had when ye married me, about Ireland, and when ye said that if only one man or one woman remained faithful to her and prayed to God for her, that she would slough England's yoke as surely as the sun would

HUSBAND AND WIFE

rise ? I don't hear ye talkin' so much these days about God and prayer."

"And what's the good, Moira ? I'm a good Catholic as you know and I attend to me religious duties, but all the prayer in the world won't get an English soldier out of Ireland. The only thing that England understands is the magazine rifle."

"Well, why don't you use it ?" asked his wife, her great golden eyes looming at him.

"Because we haven't enough of them to use," he answered, sullenly. "The only thing that England understands is force."

"It's not the only thing that God understands," replied his wife.

"God is always on the side of the big battalions," he came back, dejectedly.

"And the women of the Cumann don't think that way. . . ."

"Ah, don't be talkin' to me about those cracked women," said her husband angrily.

"What do they know about politics ?"

"And is it politics that are troublin' ye now, Brian ?" and the great eyes had again opened at him. "I thought Ireland was goin' to give up the politics that ruined Parnell and brought John Redmond to a traitor's grave. Politics !"

"The arbitration table, I tell ye, is the only thing," replied her husband, doggedly.

As he spoke, his wife's face went suddenly white. She went over to the basin in the corner to be deathly sick.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"Oh, Brian!" she said apologetically, "it is that terrible sickness that won't leave me this time at all, at all. I feel that God has deserted me—and Ireland. To hear me own husband . . ."

She broke off to writhe in her nausea of soul and body.

"There's many to-day," she went on as she came to herself, "that don't believe in God any more in Ireland, and Ireland down on her belly after seven hundred years and all. And I with the child coming and worse than I ever was and the child not comin', Doctor McGrath says, for another month and I out in me reckonin'. How'll I pass the time and with all this load hanging heavy on the neck like a halter?"

"Oh, Moira, don't, don't!"

"If Ireland loses her God she loses everything. Didn't Father Devlin say that at the altar of the Pro-Cathedral last Sunday?"

"Father Devlin indeed!" ejaculated her husband as though something had bitten him and forgetting all his pity of the moment before. "Isn't it the queer thing that the priests can't keep their noses out of politics? You and your Father Devlin! Isn't it him and the likes of him that is makin' the position of Ireland impossible wid their gallivantin's to America and their tellin' the people there and here that only by the blood-sacrifice can Ireland win her freedom? Father Devlin!"

The young man swung rapidly up and down the

HUSBAND AND WIFE

room as though Father Devlin himself were on his heels.

“Ye didn’t say that, Brian, two years ago, and ye didn’t say it when Cardinal Roche sent out the message denouncing the young Republicans and the Irish Republican Brotherhood last month. Hasn’t Rome always backed England against Ireland—and the next thing, you’ll be backing her too!”

She looked at him, her face pale and her breath coming and going as though something were driving her.

“Do you place your politics before your God?” the young man asked bitterly, pitilessly, for all the torture that was in her face.

“No, but I place my country before my Church when my Church is not true to her Lord who wanted all men to be free. I tell ye, Brian, if Rome is untrue to Ireland, we’ll have an Irish Catholic Church of our own!” she said passionately.

“Now I know where you would be at! ’Tis heresy you’re afther. That’s where your Republicanism leads, is it?”

“Better be a heretic than a traitor, Brian. And aren’t the Protestants often the best Irishmen? Where would Ireland have been in the past but for Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Robert Emmett and Wolfe Tone? Who led the United Irishmen a hundred years ago but Ulster Protestants? And I’m as good a Catholic as you are yourself.” She was panting heavily, piteously.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Brian Boru looked at his young wife closely, and then a great tenderness had seized him for he had run in to her and had caught her in his arms. But she pushed him away angrily.

"You never did that before," he said gravely.

"Nor did you," she answered as grave.

"Do you know what day is to-day?" she asked.

He looked at her a moment and then a great flush had run up in his face, and mounted to his forehead.

"Ah, ye needn't tell me Brian, for I know it all. In this hour I seem to know so much that was always hidden. You forgot that it was the day our Blessed Lord died for men and for Ireland."

"If ye knew, Moira, what is hanging over us to-day, you'd understand and forgive even as God will understand and forgive. Don't ye know that we are at the parting of the ways and that Ireland before the year is out may be divided into Dominion Home Rule men and Republicans? Haven't I to meet your Father Devlin within half an hour at Sheilah's? Do any of us have time to think about religion these days?"

"Brian," she said coming to him as though she had abandoned the fight and looking at him earnestly, "take me with you to the Pro-Cathedral this day like in the old times when we knelt there side by side. I'll go with ye to Sheilah's, and then, maybe, Sheilah would go with the two of

HUSBAND AND WIFE

us on to the Cathedral afterwards for the Stations of the Cross."

"Oh, but 'tis Father Devlin, the fire-eater, you're wishful of seein', Moira," he said with a little laugh that had tears in the heart of it. He walked over to the chair where he had thrown his hat and then, after a moment, led his wife downstairs.

He was like a man at the crossroads, undecided which road to take.

CHAPTER XV

HATE

WHEN Brian and his wife entered Sheilah's studio, it was to find the redoubtable Father, very much in the saddle and riding a hobby which he, so to speak, scarified with the spurs of hate and indignation.

For Father Devlin was now the religious leader of the most implacable section of the Republicans and had been going through Ireland, first to the dismay, then to the active hostility of his spiritual superiors, preaching a veritable cult of death.

Father Devlin was a very tall and very raw-boned man with a pair of brown eyes with red lights in them, set in a face of extreme pallor, lights which came and went as he held his audience with the fiery eloquence of a Franciscan missionary.

"The only good Englishman is a dead Englishman," the good father was saying as they came into the room.

"True for ye, Father," came in answering litany from some of those gathered there. Shaun, who was sitting near the fireplace, with the little

HATE

Merrow on the inside position, said nothing, although his lips shut themselves in silent approval, but Jasper Moriarty, opposite him, only sucked at his big meerschaum and said nothing.

"Oh, come now, Father," said a professor from Galway University, a rather plump young man with the beginnings of a stomach and a rather greasy waistcoat who was smoking a cigarette, and himself one of the best Irish scholars in Ireland, "we don't want to do any more killing than we can help, even though we've got the Black and Tans quartered on us."

"The only good Englishman is a dead Englishman," returned Father Devlin, implacably. "At least as long as there's an Englishman left in Ireland. Was it that sort of thing you're after sayin' that the Black and Tans said when they took young Father Murphy and threw him into the bog above Iniskoort and when they knocked the brains out of Michael Quinn after they had broken his left arm and beaten him over the head—was it they that talked about not doin' any more killin' than they could help?" The little brown eyes shot angry lights.

"Well, there are good English soldiers as well as bad ones," returned the young professor mildly, "and the best of the English officers are ashamed of what their men have done as would the English people themselves if they only knew of it and the press were not muddled. The average Englishman is a fair-minded man. I lived in England for four years and I know him.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

The worst you can say of him is that sometimes he is . . .”

“ . . . a damn fool who hates having to think, who blubbers over with sentiment but has not a spark of emotion in his whole mentality ! ”

The interrupter was Terence O’Boyle, obviously in one of his bitter moods, who had been sitting in a far corner smoking one of his interminable cigarettes. The professor went on :

“ What none of us Irishmen ever seem to understand, and there is quite a lot that we don’t understand though we’d rather die than admit it, is that the men who lead England and have always led her are as different from the mass of the people they lead as though they were of another race. They are another sort of soul and if I were a Buddhist instead of a good Catholic, I’d say perhaps that they were specially reincarnated souls, with a long record of leadership behind them in other lives, astute, cunning, calculating souls, sent to lead one of the simplest and fairest minded races on earth.”

“ God sends the light in the dark places,” said Jasper Moriarty. “ Out of the mouths of babes . . . ” He might have said it in a light irony or in earnest. Nobody could ever say in such moments whether Jasper Moriarty were in jest or earnest.

“ Why,” Moriarty continued, “ we Irishmen know nothing at all of the great world outside, nor do we wish to know it—but every single one

HATE

of us carried the cosmos in his waistcoat pocket. God knows we are the most insular, ignorant of races, although the Englishman runs us pretty close—but the Englishman, anyhow, does not make a brag of his ignorance and insularity—the only thing he brags about is his modesty. And the queerest thing about it all is that although we never read a good book or care for any good music, there is something in us implanted by the Almighty God in whom some of us are beginning not to believe which gives us kinship with His saints and makes us heirs not only of the earth but of the Heavens above. The world can teach us the things of time, but, by the Holy! we can teach the world the things of eternity.”

He was silent as he puffed at his big pipe, the others staring at him. A mad devil that fellow Moriarty. Sure couldn't anybody see that the finger of God was on him—but whether it touched him to madness or touched him to understanding—who could say?

Father Devlin, however, was not disposed to allow this incursion from a man whom he hated to pass without notice.

“That's right, Jasper Moriarty, go on and defame your country like your Dominion Home Rule friends. And if we are insular—what of it? Isn't it better to have an insular Irish Ireland than an Ireland that is but the tag-end of Empire? Haven't we traitors enough without being black-guarded by our 'friends'?” The way in which Father Devlin used the word “friends” was

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

exactly as insulting as he intended it to be. But Jasper was not to be drawn. He had said what he had set himself out to say, and that was the end of it. "A bitter sullen devil and a dangerous devil," thought Father Devlin. And he was not alone.

"Well, they won't find the men that put Father Murphy in a bog in a hurry," put in a big good-natured looking man, a farmer on a visit to Dublin, who had listened to all this conversation with most intense mystification. "They've been searchin' for them the past three weeks and the divil a thrace of them can they find."

"And why can't they find them?" asked Shaun in malignant anticipation.

"Because, signs on it, the boys put the two of them in the gas oven at the gasworks and they howlin' to hell."

A crackle of laughter ran around the little room. Shaun's red-rimmed eyes twinkled bloodily and the icy face of Sheilah set. There was stifled satisfaction in the face of the gaunt, ascetic priest.

"And I tell you all, that it is these things which bring disgrace on Ireland," said the young professor after the noise had subsided. His face was tense as he looked around the group which stared at him.

"We don't want men who fear to face the issue," said the priest. "We dare not have them. Let them get out of the movement if they are

HATE

afraid. . . . All the same, I don't think we ought to torture men," he added in sulky concession to his cloth.

"Wan of them was a Catholic, by the same token," the farmer went on as though nobody had spoken. "Sure didn't the boys give him every Christian chance to make his peace with God and didn't they fetch a priest to him before putting him where you know." He nodded significantly.

"It was too good for him," said Moira O'Rourke, looking pallidly at him. "Hell's not enough for the likes of them." It was terrible to see the white hate on her face and she about to give new life to the world.

"Oh, Moira, how can you say that?" said her husband, "even though we know what some of the Black and Tans have done to our own in the way of torture, and to our women. We'll have to give up the gun and the gas if we're ever to save Ireland."

"Now, do ye hear that?" asked the implacable priest, showing his white teeth in the ghost of a smile. "Do ye hear that now? 'Tis there ye have the Dominion Home Ruler in all his glory, good Irishmen that they are!"

"I'm as good an Irishman as yourself, Father," replied Brian and the blood came up in his face in a great crimson wave. "I agree with Professor Delaney there. Ireland must rid herself of the psychology of the gun."

"And I tell you this," said the priest in quiet

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

even tones, as though the other had not spoken. "I tell you that none of the men who wish to negotiate were good Irishmen or ever could be good Irishmen. They were born traitors from their mothers' wombs. We don't want them with us. We don't want them in Ireland. Let them go over to England to their friends the English."

Brian O'Rourke looked at his wife as though half in appeal. But Moira had turned her face away.

"And what is more," went on Father Devlin, "though as a priest of God I am against torture, if we can only put our hands on the man who gave the code away last week to the Castle, we'll give him a touch of the gas, too."

The little Merrow-man, sitting before the fire, glanced at the priest from under his black cutty and suddenly hit a lump of coal on the head with the poker.

"We have traitors in low places and we have them in high—and I don't know which are the worst," said the priest with a certain malignant intent. And then the fiery eye had fallen on Jasper as he sucked at the amber stem of his meerschaum :

"Judas Iscariot," he said, "was an Irish-man !"

Every eye there followed that of the priest. For a moment there was something in the air that chilled—something almost of terror. But the man at whom they looked seemed to be so

HATE

concentrated upon the systematic stopping of his pipe as to be quite unconscious of what was happening about him. The pale blue eyes with the tiny black irises set themselves to their work as the others watched, and on the forehead in the firelight there was a faint sweat.

The smashing of another lump of coal by the Merrow broke the silence and seemed to relieve the overcharged atmosphere, as Moira rose to leave and her husband followed her.

CHAPTER XVI

GOOD FRIDAY

AS Moira and Brian went with Sheilah up the steps of a Cathedral that looked like an apology in stone, it was to see men and women and even little children streaming up the broad steps on this Good Friday.

Inside the church, there came that cold earthy smell, sweet to the taste, of the human body unwashed. The wooden seats, with their little purgatorial kneeling boards, stretched away on either side into the vastness of the place. Around the walls there was the ebb and flow of surging crowds who "made the Stations," their eyes cast upwards at the bleeding Christ reared high above them as they told their beads and read their fates in the greasy shining stones on which they kneeled.

Over there on the other side was the tall, grey, sandalled figure of the woman whom Moira had seen that very morning from her window. She bent over her beads like some grey wraith as she told her beads and her sins—a woman who, in that pallid light, looked like a dead woman. Many there were there who looked like that.

GOOD FRIDAY

The whole place reeked of cold incense, that scented Orientalism which mellowed the hearts and bodies of the faithful and upon the fumes of which their prayers rose to the Blessed Mother of Sorrows who up beyond there in the farther distance looked down pityingly upon the assembled congregation, in her arms the Babe, which crowed indifferently in plaster and blue.

But always, at the head of the chief aisle, the statue of the Calvary Christ, dominating, imploring, taking.

He stood there with the old congealed blood trickling down the worn face, a piteous figure stretching out his impotent arms over the heads of the faithful who in a long line thronged forward to imprint kiss after kiss on the bleeding feet. Christ of Ireland—the Irish Christ who personified the woes of the race which lived on misery and battered on memory.

The great temple was still save for the scutter of feet over the paving-stones—but behind, the pulsation as of some soundless litany. The echoing vastness might have been full of a howling and a moaning and the great lamentation entirely. And there was Shaun Brophy, for all his atheism, on his knees bowed in the agony of spirit—and Bernard Shaw seemed very far away.

Moirá, from where she knelt by the side of her husband looking over the serried backs of the crouching faithful, waited for the peace of God to come to her, and she big with child. But it did not come. In vain she told her beads and in

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

vain she fixed her wavering glance on the bleeding Christ.

She had always thought of Christ as an Irishman, but to-day, in the gloom of the "Pro," he seemed to her a foreigner—almost an Englishman.

What was all this worship, anyhow, but the escape from thought and from reality by a tortured people? Brian by her side—and he the stranger—had come there to forget, to escape from memory. Shaun, for all his concentration on his prayers, was only coming to Jesus Christ, the apostle of the invisible, to escape from Bernard Shaw, the apostle of reality. The young men of the Irish Republican Brotherhood made their communion and said their prayers before going out to kill—also sometimes that they might forget what they had to do. After all, Jasper Moriarty was not all wrong when he had said one day that faith was a mental anæsthesia for the Irish people.

"Dope," he had called it in the bitter way that he had.

"I can't see Ireland ever being anything until she gives up her religion," he had said in that bitter-sweet way, "and I can't see her ever being anything without it."

There was Ireland—always between two stools; never able to make up her mind; always like Mahomed's coffin—swinging between earth and heaven.

But these were wicked thoughts. Why

GOOD FRIDAY

would her mind always be wandering these latter days? Was she herself forgetting her religion?

There was Sheilah herself and she born a Protestant, saying her prayers on the other side of Brian. She prayed to the saints—but she also prayed to the gods of Ireland. But wasn't that the pagan thing to do? Praying indiscriminately to Saint Brigid, who she said was an incarnation of the Blessed Virgin, and to Mananaan the sea god and to Fergus with his shining face and smile like a shining sword. She said she was one of the old faith—of that Druid faith which still held the heart of Ireland—for indeed was not Ireland always pagan at heart with but the veneer of Christianity? Professor Delaney had said an hour ago in Sheilah's studio that every Irishman was a pantheist under the skin, and anybody who had lived in the West, where she and Brian would soon be going, knew that.

What were the fishermen of Connemara but pagans and pantheists who found the "good people" and the banshee and the stories of heath and bog and mountain nearer to them than the parables of the New Testament?

But wasn't it terrible to be thinking these things and she in the House of God on a Good Friday? But those things were not so hard to think in these days when God seemed to have deserted Ireland. There were many that thought

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

them and said nothing—for who could stop thought?

As these things played hide and seek in her mind, her eyes fell on a little man who was standing in the queue waiting his turn, a sweet-faced man, with the face of a priest and a very gentle expression in his childlike blue eyes—about him, something consecrated.

She looked at the perfectly knit figure, with something natty in it as though it were in uniform, and at the ears setting themselves closely to the oval skull and at the compact discipline of the limbs and body in which there was something soldierly—a soldier of Christ as the thought came to her.

There was a man, now.

There at least was one man who did not believe that God had deserted Ireland. Little Aloysius O'Keeffe. A little love of a man, and everybody ready to die for him.

A terrible little man, though. The secret brain, as she knew, of the Irish Republican Army and nobody knowing it but Brian and half a dozen others. A terrible little loving man with a wife that adored him and a houseful of small children. And sure, couldn't you hear the English bullets rattle in him when he moved?

Now, there was him and Brian, and every day farther apart. One for the gun and the other for the tongue.

God alone knew how it would all end. And Brian and Aloysius meeting every day and no

GOOD FRIDAY

nearer understanding, and Ireland, as always, divided.

There he stood with his rather small mouth pursed up into the smile of a child as he watched a little girl press her lips to the feet of the bleeding Jesus. And his face shining and all. There was a man, anyhow, who believed that God was on the side of Ireland and that the blessed saints and the blessed Lord himself loved little Ireland and would not see her cast down. Sure wasn't it Aloysius that had said in the big meeting in College Green before the Rising, that if every man and woman of Irish birth forgot their motherland and there was but one little child left to say a prayer for Ireland or only to think of her, not all the British Empire could block her path to freedom and to glory. Hadn't Brian himself said the same ?

And there was another who believed, kneeling just beyond him—Maggie McCann, the cracked woman. Look at her now with her beads running backwards and forwards between her fingers as though she were in a fever and her eyes upraised to the Christ and she thinkin' God knows what thoughts, and her poor head as full of angels and saints as the "Lives." And she always seeing miracles everywhere and botherin' the minds of the poor Church Street monks with her tales of holy visitations. Cracked if you like—but as sane as anyone there and shrewd enough when she liked and maybe nothing the matter with her at all but the want of a man and a child

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

as Jasper Moriarty once said with that mocking irony.

Sex and religion. Maybe they were the same thing with Maggie always talkin' about men in the concealed way that she had and sayin' how she hated them.

Well, Ireland was the cracked country, and who was to say what was cracked and what wasn't, or what was the beginning and the end of it all and the meaning ?

There were those who believed nothing since the Rising. Wasn't the voice of Aloysius O'Keeffe a voice crying alone on the broken altars ? Jasper Moriarty said he believed nothing—but then, had he ever believed, and he brought up a good Catholic ?

Jasper Moriarty who hardly ever made his confession and who didn't go inside a chapel once a year. Only for Molly down there on the quay, the Moriarty children would be heathens. Yet they said that Jasper himself, for all his indifference, never objected to Molly bringing the children to their religious duties and indeed himself would turn up once a year or so to have a sort of spring cleaning of his soul by going to confession.

Sure wasn't it Jasper that only a couple of years before had started the "Prayer for Ireland" idea ? That every man, woman and child of Irish birth throughout the world, whether in the snows of Canada, or in sun-baked Australia, or on the South African *karoo*, or stewing in the

GOOD FRIDAY

American cities should each day at a fixed hour send up a prayer for Ireland's freedom? Didn't he say that such a universal prayer coming to the ears of Almighty God would storm the battlements of heaven itself? And just because it was Jasper's notion, hadn't they thrown cold water on it. Oh, but wasn't it the great shame?

But there was no way of sizing up Jasper.

Her eyes, wandering around the church, rested on a bearded figure standing level with her at the entrance to the right aisle and staring at the Christ, as though it had come in at that moment. There was that curious fall in the back which she would have known anywhere and that graceful asceticism of body. It was the man of whom she had been thinking.

It stood there, one elbow crooked into the palm of a thin white hand as with the free hand it pulled at the pointed curl of the black beard. The red lips stood out against the pallor of the face and the pale deep-set eye ringed in its socket.

Instinctively her eyes rose to the picture of the rolling-eyed black-bearded figure in the window over the altar in the picture of the Last Supper—the man that dipped his hand in the dish with the Saviour.

Well, there were those that said one thing and others another about Jasper Moriarty. What was the truth? . . . But what was the truth

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

about Ireland itself, with her own husband forgetting ?

It came to her dimly as one sees the face of a corpse rising out of the green waters that the tall man standing there with his eyes on the Christ *was* Ireland. Even as she thought it, the tall figure had taken its place in the long queue and was moving slowly up the aisle to kiss the feet of the bleeding Christ.

Moirra bent the red glory of her head over her beads.

CHAPTER XVII

MORIARTY GOES TO THE CASTLE

JASPER MORIARTY had come back from the Cathedral to find Molly clearing away the tail of a salted cod which, with a bit of drawn butter and a boiled potato, had been the Good Friday dinner of the Moriarty clan.

"There's been a man here after you, Jasper," the little woman said as she wiped the nose of little Paudeen with the corner of her apron, for she always prided herself upon being a "clean" woman, causing Jasper to turn his head away. He was so queer about those things, his little wife would say, as though they had handkerchiefs to spare for everyday. Well, it was one of the things that no woman could be expected to understand.

"What did he say his business was?" asked her husband.

"He wouldn't let on. But he was a fine big man with an eye as deep as his chest and as blue as the sea, Jasper. He had a big black moustache and the shoulders of a peeler—but he was in plain clothes.

"Oh, Jasper," she went on, apprehension steal-

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

ing into her face as a thought seemed to come to her—"don't tell me that you are in trouble. Ye don't think it was a 'G' man he was, do you? I wish we were well out of all this Sinn Fein business."

But Jasper held his tongue.

"Ah, why is it that ye can't make your peace with the Castle, Jasper? Sure, isn't it well to stand in with the police?" She said it wheedlingly.

"And betray others?" asked Jasper bitterly. "Isn't there anyone that will help me?" He looked around the little shop despairingly like a hunted man.

"Who wants you to betray anybody? But what's the good of writing all those bitter things in the 'Sniper' and gettin' yourself and your family into throuble? . . . Ah, there he is now," she ejaculated as she pointed between the hanging oilskins to the big man in the bowler hat and with the massive lifted shoulders, who was reconnoitring outside.

The big rollicking figure entered the doorway to fill it. It was Sergeant Michael MacGuire who, judging by his girth and the velvety smoothness of his olive skin, was waxing fat and kicking.

"Good evenin' again, ma'am," he said to Mrs. Moriarty with much politeness, lifting his moustache a little away from his even white teeth. "And good evenin' Moriarty. May I have a word with you in private?"

Jasper's answer was to throw open the door to

MORIARTY GOES TO THE CASTLE

the little parlour behind the shop and to motion for him to enter.

The smile had passed from the sergeant's face as he turned, his back to the yard window, to face his man.

"Listen, Moriarty," he said without introduction. "I have a warrant for your arrest on a murder-charge."

Two tiny beads of perspiration stood out on Jasper's forehead.

"What's the charge?" he said at last.

"Well, it seems they have proof that you took part in the defence of the House near the Viaduct in the Rising. We have a Crown witness to prove it. And that means a tight cravat in the early morning."

"Well?" said Moriarty.

"Now, Moriarty," said the sergeant cajolingly as he placed one hairy hand on his man's shoulder, "the authorities are anxious to give you a chance. They don't want to press this charge, if you'll only be a sensible man and not like the last time they had you up there when you wouldn't listen to reason or anything."

Jasper looked as though he knew what being "a sensible man" meant.

"You'll have to come up to the Castle with me," said the sergeant, closely searching the face of the man before him. "They'll be wantin' to ask you some questions, and if you answer them the right way, you'll not hear anything more of this I'm thinkin'."

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

“Who told you to say that?”

“Now don’t be askin’ foolish questions. For you, I am doin’ it on me own responsibility. And I’m well in wid the Castle as you know,” said the big policeman preening himself under the light from the window as he stroked his light blue silk tie with his right hand.

Jasper Moriarty hung in the wind for a moment.

“Anyhow,” said the sergeant, still watching him, “you’ll have to come with me in any case up to the Castle. And for your own sake, don’t be thryin’ anything on, for if anything happened here, it isn’t the Castle that would be askin’ questions,” he said laughingly as he took his left hand from his trousers pocket to show a natty little pistol that fitted snugly the hollow of his hand. With the same motion, he patted the right trousers leg of Moriarty, going behind him to place his right hand in his pocket and, thrusting it down through the blind pocket, to take out a long flat magazine pistol which was strapped along the hollow of the thigh inside.

“Just to make everything nice and right,” he said genially.

“Who told ye I carried something there?” asked Jasper, surprised into comment.

“Ah, never mind who told us. Maybe it was Father Devlin and maybe it was Shaun the Watcher.”

“Shaun?” said his victim stupidly.

“Well, it’s not for me to say anything more, so

MORIARTY GOES TO THE CASTLE

by your leave, Jasper Moriarty, we'll be walking. But let me go out first and I'll be waitin' for you inside the little iron gate at the back of the Castle where you went in before, so that nobody'll recognize you. But look well around you before you go in."

Jasper went out through the shop to find Molly looking dumbly at him and so along the quay and across the crazy narrow bridge and then up the slope to the grey pile that, like some monstrous louse, crouched over the face of the city.

He entered the stony bowels of the monster by the grim gate of iron, inside which, by ill-considered chance, an old white rose perfumed the air of the place. There, he found the sergeant waiting for him, and so by winding ways, they found their way to the heart of this gargoyle in stone, passing here, an alleyway filled with rusted barbed wire, there, a slope that led downwards to a narrow black door held by two great bolts, whilst high over their heads in one of the dark windows a policeman sat, his shaven head out of the opening, whistling "Planxy Kelly."

They passed through the maze, the genial sergeant threading his way unerringly until they reached a sort of keep where after a moment's delay they were shown into a small square room lighted by a single high window, under which sat two men, with a third standing by the old fireplace.

The man in the middle with his foot on the fender, Jasper recognized at once. He was a

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

rather luscious-looking old gentleman, with a port wine nose and a genial if watery eye. He was the man whom it had been decided to "remove" when he first came to the Castle, but upon the intervention of Brian Boru he had been spared. Nobody wished to harm the genial nonentity who was one of the Castle chiefs, for as the wretches who huddled around the Castle gates said with that all-knowingness which occasionally does make "the voice of the People the voice of God:" "Sure isn't the poor man only doin' what he is paid to do. 'Tis the system, not the man, I tell ye."

Between him and the man sitting at the centre of the table there sat a mouse-coloured man, faded and worn, whose thinning hair knitted itself to the tracery of veins on the shrunken skull, whilst the other, a tall, dark, courteous gentleman with a suave voice, a quick dark eye and a nut-brown beard, was the man known to Sinn Fein as "Billy the Grand Inquisitor," the mouse-coloured man being his familiar.

The bearded man continued his conversation with the man standing at the fireplace as though for him Moriarty and his companion had no existence. He did not even turn to look at the sergeant or his man, but discussed with animation the virtues of a patent gun he had been trying. "Deadly, I tell you Sir, deadly. The ejector is the cutest thing you ever saw."

Moriarty stood there awkwardly like a naughty boy, his eyes after the first quick glance looking

MORIARTY GOES TO THE CASTLE

upwards through the window over the desk, framing a bit of blue sky.

All at once the bearded man turned with a quick : "Moriarty !"

Jasper instinctively straightened himself whilst the policeman, familiar with the procedure, had the confident air of the favoured official.

"Moriarty," said the man with the beard, harshly, "you know what we have against you and you know that we can and will put the noose about that long neck of yours . . ." he paused, "unless, unless . . ." He stopped.

In a moment his manner had changed as he said softly, almost gently :

"Unless you are a sensible man . . ." and he smiled sleepily into the eyes of the man who was staring at him.

"Is there anything you want to say to us ?" asked the mouse-coloured man after a little interval.

The gentleman with the port-wine nose moved uneasily to his other foot.

"I think I'll go now, Joyce," he said. "You manage this sort of thing better than I . . ."

"If you like, Sir," said Joyce. But there was relief in his eyes.

Moriarty understood perfectly well. It was the custom in the Castle for the men at the top to know nothing about the doubtful things done below them in the name of law and order.

The man at the mantelpiece, now going out of the room was a gentleman thrust by circumstance

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

into a situation which at times was poignantly distasteful. It told Jasper in a flash what was required of him and what he had to face. But he said nothing.

"Wait outside," said the bearded man curtly to the sergeant, who went out.

"Come, come, Moriarty," said the man turning once more to Moriarty, "we know from the 'Sniper' and otherwise what a clever, intelligent man you are—one of the cleverest in the country and wasting your brains upon a lot of thankless scoundrels who were only too glad to inform on you. Now, what have you got to say about the Viaduct House?" The change again was abrupt.

"I have nothing to say," said Moriarty as though reluctant even to say that much. Centuries of suppression had taught him and his forbears a terrible reticence.

"You know, Moriarty, there is always an opening in the Castle for a man of your talents and appearance. Your friend the sergeant will have told you that. You know perfectly well, for you are too intelligent to think otherwise, that Ireland—I mean Sinn Fein"—he corrected hurriedly, "can't hope to fight England and win. You will only be helping your country and yourself by accepting an offer which will not be made again to a dead man." And he laughed pleasantly, did the gentleman with the beard.

"'Accepting an offer,'" repeated Jasper bitterly. "Why don't you put the money on the table while you're about it?"

MORIARTY GOES TO THE CASTLE

“Here is the sworn information,” went on his interlocutor pleasantly, as though he had not spoken. “It is signed by various people, including an interesting young gentleman called, I believe, Shaun the Watcher, otherwise known as Shaun Brophy.”

He turned to the man at his side, who handed him a bundle of papers.

“Why, I see we have here enough evidence to hang half a dozen men,” said the pleasant-faced gentleman. He looked at Jasper steadily.

Referring once more to his papers he went on :

“I see here that your friend says you are known in the secret circles of Sinn Fein as Judas Iscariot. Dear, dear ! What a very unpleasant appellation.” The bearded gentleman was mildly amused.

But the man before him kept his face set.

“Why don’t you put the money on the table ? ” he again burst out and then snapped his lips as though he would cut his tongue off for having spoken.

“Because, Mr. Moriarty, we know perfectly well that even if we did that kind of thing, it would never appeal to a man of your brains and, let me say, ambition. What we purpose doing is to give you the opportunity of exercising the talents with which you are endowed and which your comrades have spurned. I will go further. We will give you the opportunity of rising to high place in the government service where you will have”—and he paused again—“power.”

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"Show me that affidavit and that letter," said Jasper at last, his face working under the jibe of his emotions.

"No, no, Moriarty. That is asking too much," said the suave gentleman stroking his beard a little. "But what we will do is to send you back to your friends outside, if you agree to our terms, and after the present troubles are past we will remove you to London and give you the chance for which thousands of clever ambitious men wait in vain through a lifetime. Now, what do you say?"

The man before him looked around the room like a trapped animal. The pale eye travelled to the high window and around the walls. A hundred tiny beads of sweat stood on the high white forehead.

And then he had burst out:

"No, God damn you! Damn you! Damn you! Damn you! Damn you! Damn you and your dirty money! Damn you and your dirty power! If I have to reckon with my comrades, that is my business, but I am no Judas. God curse you!" He was silent.

The man at the desk was smiling through all this. Then he did a most surprising thing. He called in the sergeant.

"Let Mr. Moriarty go, Sergeant MacGuire."

Moriarty looked at his tormentor and then at the open door as though not rightly under standing.

"That is all right, Mr. Moriarty," said the

MORIARTY GOES TO THE CASTLE

man at the table. "We understand these outbursts very well. You are perfectly free." And he had turned to pull out a drawer and to take from it a box of cigarettes, one of which he lit.

Jasper Moriarty walked out of the room.

As he walked out of the gates, a man in a covert coat buttoned closely around his neck and with a sporting cap pulled down over his eyes lounged along the opposite side. He was a small-sized man with one shoulder up and the other down and he limped as he walked. But the little red eyes were on the back of Jasper Moriarty as he went down the hill—fastened on him as though reluctant to let him go.

And as the eyes followed Jasper Moriarty down the hill, they turned a little to see a tall, dark, suave gentleman come out of the Castle gates—a man with a beautiful nut-brown beard, by his side an elegantly dressed woman, who, as they walked down the hill together, placed one slender gloved hand upon her husband's sleeve to look up into his face admiringly.

And as the man with the red-rimmed eyes looked, he saw two big men in long coats come out behind him, their hands in their coat pockets and heard the smack of the automatics and saw the tall, suave gentleman, so full of life the moment before, look laughably around and then go down, his guts shot out of him by the heavy automatics with the mushroomed bullets.

There lay Billy the Inquisitor with his blood oozing from his perforated stomach, his natty

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

malacca lying by his side and his bowler hat a few yards away.

There he lay, his wife sunk beside him, and up and down the little Irish street went the business of the day, with Billy lying in his clay and not a soul to help him. All save one little curly-headed gossoon, a very innocent boy he must have been, who now stood looking down at the Castle official, with the official's cane in one dirty little hand and the official's bowler hat in the other, waiting with smiling face for somebody to take them from him. But not a man, woman or child in the streets of Dublin that day turned to look at either him or the men who were walking slowly away down a side street.

Jasper Moriarty had turned round as he heard the crash of the automatics, to look stupidly at the man, the woman, and the little boy.

That was Ireland.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAN WITH THE FACE OF A PRIEST

IT was a grey April afternoon with the soft rain swishing gently upon the skylights of Sheilah's studio, where a large oil lamp sent its mellow glow over the tapestries on the walls, hung a moment on the frames of the oil paintings, and filled the old Dublin room with a gracious tenderness.

Around the fire of glowing turf which Sheilah always used, sat half a dozen people, including Miss Maggie McCann, drawing in its peaty odours.

"... and maybe you won't believe me but may I never if I didn't see drops of blood start out of the face of the statue before me. And so I threw meself on me face and prayed to Saint Brigid in glory to tell me the meaning."

It was Maggie talking as she had been talking for an hour.

"But how do you know it wasn't a temptation of the divil like the wan that came to Saint Brigid herself, Maggie?" asked Brian Boru from his corner, trying for the twentieth time in vain to staunch the flow of Maggie's tongue.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"Yesha ! how do I know ? " asked Maggie in contempt. "Sure wouldn't I know any divil of them all and me troubled day and night with all sorts ? Don't I know every degree of them and they hatin' me because I am holy and they hatin' Ireland."

Maggie was in her glory this evening. She remained sunk in thought for a moment after her last outburst and then had run off into something else :

"No, Mike," sez I, "I won't marry you—not if you were to go down on your bended knees fore-ninst me. I am vowed to the holy life with no men in it." Maggie, in the way that she had, had sprung to another subject having jumped the gap riding on her own thoughts and expecting everybody else to have followed her.

"Then why don't you go into a convent, Maggie ? " asked Sheilah. "Then you would be removed from temptation entirely."

"Go into a convent ? Sure can't any fool of a woman go into a convent when the world gets too strong for her and so escape its snares ? That's the coward's way," said Maggie, still with that supreme contempt ; and then, with that baffling illogicality of Ireland, had added : "but sure aren't the nuns the holy little women after all ? " She went on :

"I prefer to stay in the world and face what the good God sends me, as I told Father Devlin the other day. If 'tis me fate to face more than another woman's share of

THE MAN WITH THE FACE OF A PRIEST

the flesh and the devil, then I must only face it. And mind you, 'tis not only for God I'm doin' it, but for Ireland," went on Miss McCann, who, in her more devastating moments, was inclined to confuse her country and her Maker.

"Ireland will never be free until every man and especially every woman in it devotes themselves to a life of celibacy. There's a black fellow over there in India, Gandhi is his name, and for all his black skin that's what he tould the Indians if they wanted to throw off the English yoke. 'Tis this lovin' and forgettin' and bringin' childer into the world that is destroyin' Ireland, I tell ye," she said, scowling at Moira where she sat with her baby in her arms. "I know what I'm talkin' about," she said as she saw her auditors struggling with their sense of humour, "and I've been tould it in visions by Saint Brigid herself, who, for that matter, comes to me nearly every night.

"There's a little song I composed afther me last visitation, and maybe you'd like to hear the way it goes?"

Nobody replying, for nobody had ever been able to hold Miss McCann from poetry, she pulled herself to her feet and with her great nose and grey eyes and thin body she swayed in the middle of the room, but finding that position not dominating enough, she climbed to the top of the raised dais to the imminent danger of the barmbrack and the tea:

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Oh, 'twas one night as I lay sleepin' in me little
holy bed
And the saints and angels round me an' they
flyin' overhead
An' no less a saint than Brigid, flew down to me
and said :
If ye want ould Ireland to be free 'tis alone you'll
occupy your bed.

Brian groaned deeply and the recitation stopped abruptly. Maggie glared at the interrupter who seemed to be struggling with his feelings as he sat with his head sunk on his broad chest.

"Not another line!" she said. "An' I tormented for Ireland."

She jumped down and despite all the protestations of Sheilah and Brian Boru, who, so to speak, abased himself at her feet, she flounced out of the room and banged the door behind her until the house rang again.

"Is it mad that she is?" asked Moira.

"She's no more mad than yourself," said Brian, "and there's plenty more like her in this island where all the wise ones are mad and the sane ones fools. Maggie McCann can say more beautiful and more true things in five minutes than'd fill a book of philosophy and can talk more nonsense in one than'd fill a madhouse."

"Well, if it comes to that," said the little man with the face of a priest, breaking his silence for the first time. "Weren't all the holy women and the holy men a bit cracked? Sure didn't they

THE MAN WITH THE FACE OF A PRIEST

say of our Lord that he had a devil ? And who is to say where sanity ends and madness begins and isn't Ireland the borderland where they both meet ? ”

“ The land of drunken gods,” said Sheilah from her seat by the fire.

“ Yes, drunk from suppression of instinct and from strong tea and from hate and from love and from dreams—dreams that don't come true,” said Brian bitterly.

Brian Boru, his big loose frame hunched together, his hands set deep in his crosspockets and his feet stretched out before him, was staring into the glowing peat. In the opposite corner, little Aloysius O'Keeffe, a natty figure, sat bolt upright on his high-backed chair like a little boy who has been told to sit straight and not kick his feet. Moira, in the folds of a big arm-chair gave the breast to the child she had borne five months before in FitzWilliam House, whilst Sheilah Shaw, her finely moulded head set in the hollows of her hands, her elbows resting on her knees, leant forward as she gazed into the fire.

“ I wonder is Moriarty coming ? What time is Shaun bringing him ? ” asked Brian, at last.

“ Eight o'clock,” said Sheilah.

“ Well, I don't like this business, and that's God's truth,” said Brian. “ Why did we ever start out on it ? Tell me that ? Anyhow we have nothing against the man, and Shaun shadowing him for the past God knows how long.”

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"We have our suspicions," said little Aloysius, shutting his mouth tight.

"Isn't it bad enough to have to spy on the English without having to spy on our own?" asked Brian querulously. He looked like a man about to have a nervous breakdown.

"And where is it to end?" he asked after a moment. "First we set our men to spy on the English; then we set them to spy on our own spies—sure haven't we spies inside the Irish Republican Army itself?—and now we have so many threads running that I'm damned if I know where we stand to-day. For all I know, you, Aloysius, may have been set to spy on me." He let a little laugh out of him.

"Arrah be aisy, Brian. Neither you nor any other man will be troubled with spies as long as you are true to Ireland."

"It all depends upon what you mean by 'bein' true.' Young McCracken says that even thinking the idea of peace with the English means being a traitor to Ireland."

"But nobody says that being true to the idea of an Irish Republic is being a traitor," said the little man with the priest's face with a quiet intensity of his own. "There ye have the difference."

There was an air of finality about him as he shut his lips tightly, something from which there could be no appeal.

"Well, we've done our best with the gun, Aloysius," said Brian, "and now, as I often tell Moira there, 'tis time to try the tongue. Why,

THE MAN WITH THE FACE OF A PRIEST

man alive, you don't think you can fight the whole bloody British Empire, ships, men, and all?" he asked in almost tearful expostulation. "Didn't Tom M'Haffey tell the Dáil itself the other day that we hadn't enough men and ammunition to take a good-sized police barracks, much more beat the Black and Tans at their own game?"

Aloysius O'Keeffe bit his lips but remained silent.

"Yes, and isn't the Dáil itself a disgrace for a National Parliament?" said Mrs. Brian Boru from her chair, as she rocked her now satisfied baby to sleep. "There's scarcely a man on either side that can even say what he has to say without calling names like a tinker, any more than there is a man on either side who hasn't lost the gift the Irish got from the Greeks—the gift of the easy tongue. They're all so tied up playin' at politics against one another that they're afraid to speak once without thinkin' twice. A miserable little parish council lot!"

"And what would Tom M'Haffey be for an authority on war even if he is the head of the army itself?" she went on bitterly. "Isn't he half ways to a traitor himself and isn't he ready like half a dozen others to sell out to the English? Ah, don't be tellin' me," said she as she angrily rocked her baby to sleep, her big brown eyes looking out before her.

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, hould your whisht!" said Brian wearily. "Aren't I sick and tired of

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

your talk ? ” He said it with a certain ruefulness. He laughed, but his laugh hadn't the fullness of old time. Nor did the others join in.

“ I wish to God that he'd taken the tongue out of every colleen in Ireland and that he had strangled the Cumann na mBan before he sent it to plague us like the seven plagues of Egypt. ‘ The League of the Women ’ indeed ! Those silly chattering daws of women trying to interfere in things that are as far out of their reach as the power to think,” Brian went on, getting angrier and angrier, a rare thing with him. But indeed all there could see that the nerves of him were worn thin.

“ Why, if the women would only get out of it and leave it to the men, there might be a chance to win some measure of freedom for Ireland yet,” he said, finally.

“ ‘ Some measure of freedom ? ’ What do you mean by that, Brian ? ” asked little Aloysius in a voice like an ice-bath.

“ I mean what I mean,” said Brian Boru, getting more and more irritated. “ I mean Dominion Home Rule if you want to have the truth and be God ! some of us have had enough of this talk about killin' and fightin' and gunnin'. We're going to take the law in our own hands and do our own business ourselves.”

“ If you do,” said Aloysius simply, “ ye'll have to reckon with half the army, maybe a little more.”

“ Maybe it isn't only Jasper Moriarty that ought to have spies set on him,” said Moira, her

THE MAN WITH THE FACE OF A PRIEST

eyes blazing in her white face under the lamplight.

At that moment, there came a ring to the cracked bell, and Sheilah, who had sat silent through all this conversation, got up and went out through the curtains.

The others instinctively turned to look at the swaying curtains which, after a moment, were thrown back to show standing in the mellow of the lamplight the tall figure of Jasper Moriarty, his face pale as night.

He stood there for a moment, gathering back a curtain in one nervous hand and then with a gesture, a certain dignity in it, he had come forward into the circle of the firelight.

"Good evenin' Jasper," said Brian at last. "Where's Shaun?"

"He's outside in the passage talkin' to Sheilah." As he spoke he pulled out his pipe-case from his side-pocket and took from it in the careful way that he had his beautiful meerschaum, to rub it thoughtfully on his sleeve ere filling.

Aloysius, looking round, saw staring at him from between the folds of the curtain a little face with two red-rimmed eyes in it, to be followed by the body of Shaun, with Sheilah behind.

"God save all here!" said Shaun looking round the circle, but whether in earnest or in sarcasm who could say?

There was a silence as Jasper bent down to the glowing peat to plunge a spill from the glass on the mantelpiece into the heart of it and to apply it delicately to the bowl of his pipe. The flame

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

came and went to show up the dead whiteness of the face, the pale eyes with their centres now narrowed to pin points, the carefully tended beard, and the long nervous throat of the smoker and the two blue cords showing themselves at the sides of the neck as he sucked at his pipe.

"Well, Jasper," said Aloysius O'Keeffe at last with the look of a child on his face, "and how are things wid ye?"

"All right," said Jasper shortly, blowing a cloud of smoke as he did so.

"Now the Centre has a special piece of business they want carrying out." He came to the point with a sort of quiet abruptness.

"Is that so?" said Jasper, indifferently, but the big pipe glowed fiercely.

"Like that work ye did in the West. That was good work, Jasper," said the little man quietly, almost caressingly.

"Was it?" said Jasper, still short. "Well, if it was it was queer that they took me back before I had time to finish it." He looked closely at O'Keeffe.

"Oh, that," said Aloysius lightly. "That was only because they wanted you for another job up here in Dublin."

"Which they never gave me," said Jasper smoothly.

"For a very good reason. The reason for the job ceased to exist."

"Oh, that was it, was it?" said the other, incredulously.

THE MAN WITH THE FACE OF A PRIEST

"The job we have now, Jasper, is a big job and a dangerous one. But we know you don't mind danger. It concerns Sergeant MacGuire."

Aloysius O'Keeffe was looking full at Jasper as he spoke, but neither by sign nor look did Jasper seem to know it.

"You know—the MacGuire you were at school with at the Christian Brothers," went on Aloysius. "But what has to be done can only be done by someone who knows the ways of the Castle," he dropped, casually.

"I know them," said Moriarty with a certain eagerness.

"How do you know them?" The question came as soft as mother's milk, though perhaps a man's life hung on the answer.

For one instant, Jasper Moriarty, trapped, hung in the wind. Then he had said, with scarcely a pause: "Because I have been inside it."

Shaun's eyes twinkled bloodily in the fire-light.

"It was five months ago. MacGuire came down to me on Good Friday at the hand-me-down on the quay, told me there was a warrant out for my arrest on a charge of murder, and took me up to the Castle where Billy the Inquisitor cross-examined me and then let me go."

"Why did he let you go?"

"I don't know," said Jasper hesitatingly. It was the truth, but the truth is sometimes hard to recognise.

"Why didn't you report this to the Centre?"

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

asked Aloysius. And now there had entered into his questioning something remorseless.

"Because, because . . ." and now Jasper Moriarty for all his calmness faltered. "Because I wanted to see how it would develop."

"How has it developed?" went on the little terrible man.

"MacGuire came again to me yesterday and began jeering at me for what he called me want of 'savvy.' He said that they wanted me again up at the Castle and that this time I'd better be a sensible man, as if I wasn't they'd arrest me and hang me. In fact, I came here to-day to tell you that."

Brian Boru shuffled uneasily in his chair and drove his hands deeper into his crosspockets. Sheilah kept her head in her hands and stared into the fire. Moira had sunk out of sight in the folds of her armchair.

"Well, Jasper," said the little man, "we're goin' to give you a chance to prove your words." He glanced at Brian as he spoke as though he were determined that he should be a witness of what he was saying. "We have information that Sergeant MacGuire will be taking a new jaunt in the West, and maybe you can make it worth the Castle's while to go with him. I will only say wan thing to you: 'Don't harm a hair of the big black moustache of Sergeant MacGuire! . . . at least, not yet. He is very precious to the Centre, but there is no harm in telling us everything he does and says while he is down there.' What do you say?"

THE MAN WITH THE FACE OF A PRIEST

"Say," answered the tall pale man, his eyes searching around him. "Say—of course that I'll do what I have to do."

There could be no doubt of the passion of the man as he stood there in the lamplight, his forehead a-glisten.

"Shaun there will be goin' down to the West about the same time, wid Brian and Moira here," said the little man in that quiet voice. "It's about some money we're raisin'. If there's anything to report, you can report it to Shaun—or to Brian Boru," he added after a moment's pause and as though still determined to bring Brian into this business.

"Well, I'll be goin'," said little Aloysius, as he put on his overcoat.

As he paused near Jasper to button up the collar of his grey frieze coat, whilst the others also began to prepare for departure, he said in a low clear whisper :

"Jasper, the Centre wants to know the movements of the new Grand Inquisitor during next week, and especially on Friday. His wife is up at that maternity place on the Green and he goin' in and out to visit her. Find out exactly what he is doin' that day and tell me. You're free of the Castle you know. . . . By the way," he broke off, "we have reason to know that the authorities think you had a hand in that Good Friday business when Billy the Inquisitor met his end. Well, 'tis a hard thing to serve two masters, but we're goin' to give you the chance to serve one—Sinn

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Fein—and through your friend MacGuire . . and to the death.”

There was an indescribable irony in his voice and in the smile on his face. Without waiting for an answer, he turned to Shaun :

“ Will you be walkin’ ? ”

“ I will,” said Shaun.

“ We’ll be goin’, too,” said Brian placing a big shawl around his wife and sleeping baby with a great tenderness, his wife looking up at him in that blind searching way that she had had ever since that first day in the maternity home before her first baby was born.

They all went out, leaving Jasper Moriarty standing carelessly, one foot crossed over the other, his elbow resting on the mantelpiece. He was looking earnestly into the glowing bowl of his meerschaum.

CHAPTER XIX

JASPER MORIARTY SPEAKS HIS MIND

JASPER stood there in the firelight waiting for Sheilah to come back through the curtains after seeing her guests out.

He stood there like a hunted man. His eyes seemed to search vainly the high walls and the glass roof of the studio as though seeking escape.

He turned to see Sheilah standing in the opening of the curtains, looking at him intently. The lamplight fell upon her smooth brown hair and slender neck and gently curving bust. It played on the unset emerald which she wore around her neck by its slender golden cord, her only jewel, and ran downwards to where the green and gold shoes peeped out from under her dress.

The man stood there and the agony in his eyes seemed to bring something into her own.

She moved across quickly to him and placing her hand on his arm, led him like a child to a chair and forced him down into it.

"I want to speak with you," she said.

"Listen, Jasper, what are you going to do?"

He sat there sullenly.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"No man has the right to kill for Ireland who would not die for Ireland," she said.

"How do you know I was going to kill and how do you know I would not die for Ireland?" he asked, raising his head for a moment.

"The truth is, Jasper, that these days I know nothing about you at all, at all. How can I know anything about you seein' that I love you? When we love a thing we don't know it—we just love it. I only know that I have my instincts about you and they make me afraid."

"That's right," said the man in the chair suddenly rising to his feet and walking up and down the room. "That's right. Sure didn't I know that you suspected me like all the rest? Isn't it this damned suspicion that is driving me mad?"

"Do ye think I don't know now why Aloysius sent for me to-night? Do ye think I don't know that the Centre who know all, know that I was brought up to the Castle last Good Friday and once before that again, and am I not sure that they suspect me black as death? God damn it! isn't everybody suspecting everybody else—but all suspect Jasper Moriarty.

"What have I done? And they put the trailing of MacGuire on me—not to test me indeed, for if I trailed half the Castle and killed the other half they wouldn't believe but that I was ready to sell them the next minute. They put it on me to torture me—to force the traitor to do the dirty work against his own, so they've got me coiled, body and soul. Your instincts

JASPER SPEAKS HIS MIND

were not so far out, after all. But be Christ ! if there's killin', it won't be only on one side."

"Oh, Jasper, Jasper ! what's that you're sayin' to me ?" She cried it aloud.

"Oh, ye needn't be frightened I won't do it. They don't know what I know. They don't know that MacGuire has been on my track day and night for three years to make my life a living hell."

He stood there, looking about him like a haunted man.

"What is it you are going to do ? Are you going to lift your hand against your own—against those who lead Ireland ?"

"Never mind what I'm goin' to do," the man answered. "But I won't jib at MacGuire, I promise you that."

He went on : "They don't know that that black devil always had it in for me ever since we were boys together at the Christian Brothers and I told on him for stealin' out of another boy's desk. And they don't know that—hell's alive !—that he's struck under my sister Honora, here in Dublin, any more than he knows I know it himself—the girl he is out pretendin' to be courtin' and she with child and he refusin' to make her an honest woman. Neither they nor you need be afraid. I have a long score to settle with black Michael MacGuire."

"Don't you know, Jasper, that if I were sure of you and you were sure of yourself, I'd tell you to do what you have to do in the name of God

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

and with my blessing and the blessing of Ireland. This man MacGuire sent de Burgh and Rafferty and the four boys of Castleknock to the gallows. He has been informer and paid traitor. But God won't use for his instrument the hand that is not sure of itself."

"You mean the hand with the money in it?" said Jasper Moriarty.

"I don't mean anything," said Sheilah turning her eyes away from his.

Then she had turned them again to him.

"Jasper, will you tell me the truth?" she appealed to him desperately. "I will not ask you again. Will you prove to me that you are fit to do this thing for Ireland?"

The tall man looked down at her as she dropped as though in a weakness, on to the raised dais behind her. Then he had knelt down at her feet in the firelight and had put his arms in her lap as though he were a child at his mother's knee.

His long hands clasped and unclasped themselves.

"I will tell you the truth," he said, simply.

"Never have I taken a penny from the English. Never have I betrayed my comrades. But I have been tempted. Tempted not with money—that couldn't buy me—but with the realization of hope deferred . . . with power. I have had my offers." He said it almost boastfully.

"What I told O'Keeffe about the Castle was God's truth, only that I didn't tell him I had been there once before."

JASPER SPEAKS HIS MIND

"I believe you, Jasper, I believe you. I want to believe you."

"There you go again," said the man half rising to his feet. "Even now you don't really believe me. God Almighty! how am I to say things so that people will believe them? Tell me that!"

"Jasper, for the last time. If you would only be frank with me. If you would only tell me the truth from the beginning to the end—make a clean confession of it—then I could help you. But you—you are keeping something back. I feel it. I know it. You may not be conscious of it yourself—but it is there. I told you that day in the house down on the quay that it was ambition that was driving you headlong into something, the end of which you couldn't see."

"And I told you the same day that I had never taken a halfpenny of blood-money and I haven't. . . . But there's to be an end to this. I am at the cross-roads, Sheilah."

He came slowly to his feet and stood over her to look down at her with a dark earnestness.

He was very quiet for a second or two—and then it came out of him like the molten lead from the burning vat.

"I tell ye I hate the whole bloody business. I hate it as Shaun the Watcher hates it—for he is the only wan of them all that I trust. He knows the inside of it all. First I used to be reproaching him with his hard scepticism—but faith! 'tis now I know that he had the good reason.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

‘My God!’ said he to me one day down on the quay, ‘for what was it I put me neck into the noose that Easter Monday of the Risin’—for a country of four millions out of which two thousand took the gun in their hands and the rest looked on to laugh?’ And hadn’t he the truth in him when he said it?

“I told you some of the truth that day on the quay—now I’ll tell ye some more. There’s many an Irishman of us all that would be willing to die for Ireland in one breath and sell it in the next. Love and hate are the same thing in the Irishman and never a difference between them. And doesn’t the Castle know that?”

“Look at me, Sheilah . . .” She made a gesture to stop him, but he was unstoppable. He was like a man out of his mind.

“No, ye can’t stop me now. Look at me, Sheilah. From the day when as a little boy in the Brothers I read the story of the ’98 Rebellion and discovered that I was an Irishman and not a West Briton, what has Ireland given to me and the likes of me? She has given me nothing but the ashes of sorrow and the acid of fear. There never was the moment all those years, even in the Young Ireland Society, when we did anything but talk vapidly and emptily of the glorious past. And there wasn’t a time when, if a Rising had been proclaimed, more than one or two of us would have taken the gun in the hand like I did at the House by the Viaduct.”

“Jasper!” said the woman sitting underneath

JASPER SPEAKS HIS MIND

him, sharply. "What is the truth about the Viaduct?" Then she added, reluctantly: "'Tis for that the boys first suspected you."

"And you never told me," he said in bitter reproach. "But I'll tell ye that as well as all the rest."

"When I went into the house, I went as every Irishman goes into a fight for Ireland, with my heart high and pride strong in me. And like every Irishman, when I had a moment to think, I saw the emptiness of it all. There came to me the doubts that always steal to men like me, men cursed with high sensitive imagination. When I looked at the poor boys about me lying on their backs in the cold dawn and waiting the bullet that should do England's work and when I thought of all those millions outside not caring a curse—I said: what's the good? Once I stole away only to steal back again, and the second time, when you walked through the guns up to the house when I called to you to go back, I felt I couldn't die and you lovin' me . . . and again I came back. Yet, at the long last, I got out away at the back and left my comrades behind. . . ."

"And left your comrades to do what you dared not do!" Sheilah spoke with a cold flashing irony, that came queerly from such gentle lips.

"Yes, if you like. I have nothing to hide now when I stand before you naked as before my Maker. Left them in the lurch as any one of them might have left me—and who'd be blamin' "

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

him ? How often have *they* left *me* ! ” There was a black bitterness in the last words.

“ Did any of them say the word when my name was put up for the Viaduct House command ? When I went to gaol for what I wrote in the ‘ Sniper,’ did any of them give me the columns thay gave little Aloysius O’Keeffe when he escaped from Mountjoy ? What did Brian Boru himself do to get the name he has—he a fellow without calculation—a political mountebank with his roarings and cavortings ? Aye, no wonder there are young Lorgans and Sergeant MacGuires,” he added, with gall.

“ Wouldn’t any decent man with any self-respect go over to the enemy and show them how to trail such a lot of half-hearted wretches ! Judas Iscariot ! Be Christ ! the only right men left in Ireland to-day are the Iscariots and God knows there are enough of them ! ” His words were poison-black.

“ Oh, Jasper, for God’s sake, for your own, hush ! ” The woman before him had stood up to lay a finger on her lips and looked around the studio as though each tapestry held a hidden man.

“ No, I won’t hush, now, Sheilah. All that’s too late, now. I’ve burned my boats.

“ Look at me, Jasper Moriarty. Look at me as the little boy at the Christian Brothers working like hell to pass my examinations and to win my Intermediate exhibitions and every hand against me. Look at me willing and anxious to be friendly

JASPER SPEAKS HIS MIND

and loving and not a hand held out to me—nothing but black suspicion about me.

“What, in the name of God, is on me, that no one trusts me? What is it that makes me, the man who wants to be loving and companionable, passed by with a sneer, shunned by my fellows—whenever there is work to be done by tongue or pen, I that have a pen sharper than any wan of them and a tongue to match. What is it, I say?”

But Jasper Moriarty did not wait for an answer nor did he seem to expect one.

“Haven’t I seen man after man preferred over me—aye, not only in the Rising but long before it? What is it, I say?”

“Isn’t it because I am different?”

“I tell ye, Sheilah, there is something in these things that make men smell one another out as dogs smell. It is not what you say or seem—it is what you *are*. You can’t fool instinct. It knows you. They know you.

“They knew I was different. I was always different even when I was a child at the Christian Brothers. I was different when I got my first job as errand boy at Jacobs’ Biscuit Factory, and tried to get in with the manager so as to get on. I was different when I went as a roustabout on the ‘Sniper’ to do all the hole and corner work. And I am still different.

“I married because that was the first time I ever got love from a human being, love, but not understanding, from the woman who could no more understand the man who gave her her

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

children than if a stone angel lay in her arms. Even to her that stood closest to me I was different." His voice changed.

"It is I that am the lonely man, Sheilah, or was the lonely man until I met you after I had married Molly. You were the first that ever loved and understood together. And sure love is nothin' without understandin'. You know how I came to love you, that time when we met in the Gaelic League and we both cracked about Ireland—and you know how you came to love me." There was triumph in his voice.

"It is because I loved you, Jasper, that I want you to be the man I would have you be. It is because I love you that I fear for you, and I fear for you because I know you."

"Yes, and you love me yet, Sheilah." He had drawn closer to her, his eyes shadowy, and the red lips standing out against the pallor of his face.

"I do," she said, looking stedfastly at him. "It is the thing that I fear the most of all."

"You that wouldn't look on me because of Ireland," he went on as though she had not spoken. "You that said you had given your life to Ireland. But I say to you that there is no Ireland, that we are in love with a thought, with a myth. I say that you and I and all of us are stifling in this narrow island where men's thoughts are cramped; where no man trusts; and where all that is best in human beings is suppressed and broken.

"Sheilah, I once said I would give up all for

JASPER SPEAKS HIS MIND

you if you'd come away with me. . . . I say it now the second time.

"What will you say to me, Sheilah, asthore?"

The woman raised her grey eyes to his from the dais where she now sat bolt upright and swaying and her face white—she the strong controlled woman—and she shook as though she were cold.

"We can go away to America where there is room to hide ourselves and room to forget. And who can stop us? We have the right to stand back from the fight if we will. I tell ye, Sheilah girl, I will lay at your feet all the prizes of life and of accomplishment if you will but say the word. I have an offer from a man on one of the New York dailies, who knows my work, and if I take it, who can touch us? What is Ireland, anyhow, but a pismire heap of jealousy and distrust—an island madhouse, haunted by saints and devils. What has Ireland done for us?"

He came a little closer to her, and still she swayed there piteously enough. He placed the long thin hand coming out of its worn sleeve on her slender shoulder and bent over her. She looked at him piteously, all her will turned to water.

The man came over her to place both his hands on her shoulders and to dominate her as though by sheer might, there, where she sat. A strange light shone in the pale eyes and the breath came torrid from the red lips. He bent over her without attempting to lower his hands to put them about her, until the woman under-

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

neath cowered back and away from him like a wild thing taken in the toils.

She stared at him.

"Come," he said. "Come now before it is too late. We can get out of this cursed country up through Belfast and we can take the boat at Liverpool. Ah, come with me, acushla, and come quick. Aren't I sick for you and you for me?"

The woman stared at him, all her ice melted. And then he had bent down to slip one arm about the slender neck and to half lift her up to strain her to him. The round warm breasts pressed softly against his chest and there was thunder in his ears. The beautiful head had fallen back and the lips were parted.

And then Jasper Moriarty had pressed his hot lips to her cold ones and was kissing her into forgetfulness. "I love you, I love you. . . ." He said it again and yet again.

At the first touch of those hot lips, the figure in his arms had tautened itself. And then she was fighting him off like a wild cat.

In vain did he try once more to clasp her to him. She struck at him with her nails to strike two crimson runnels in the white of his face.

He was standing away from her, his long arms hanging limply at his sides as he stared at her, his lips parted, and he panting like a mad dog. And the blood ran down his face unheeded to drop on to his collar.

"So you thought to buy me, did you?" she

JASPER SPEAKS HIS MIND

asked at last. "To buy me with my love? Oh you—you Judas!

"You would sell the most precious thing in the world for your ambition and for your future and for your vanity. The gift of God."

"Yes, I would," he answered, as he patted the blood on his face.

"Oh you—you Judas! You Judas!" she said again.

"You call me 'Judas.' Well I'll do my best to deserve it," he said, tauntingly.

She had drawn back a little and was quietly twisting up one great coil of hair which had fallen in the struggle. In a moment, she had become calm.

"And you will listen to me, Jasper. And for the last time of all.

"I loved you, Jasper Moriarty. I love you still, God help me and you. And just because I love you and will always love you, I would rather see you dead than false. The day you turn Judas, you will have to reckon with me, your lost love."

The man stood there, his hand pressing the blood on his face. He looked at her and smiled—a terrible, bloody grimace.

Then he had walked out through the curtains.

CHAPTER XX

THE SHAN VAN VOCHT

*Oh the night that Larry was stretched,
Oh there were the lovely rejoicings,
Though the priest and the doctor they fetched,
The divil a . . .*

“**A**H, Shaun boy, that’s no song for a respectable young man.”

Shaun was drying the breakfast things over in the corner of the room of the Dublin tenement house in Faddle Alley where he and his little mother lived together. And as he dried, he sang.

It was Shaun’s little mother, sitting over near the fire in her shawl and great frilled nightcap who had interrupted him.

“The world has all gone the wrong way in these days, Shaun, and you’re turnin’ with the world. Though indade I’d rather you’d be singin’ even the worst song than readin’ that terrible atheist man, Bernard Shaw.” The kindly grey eyes looked at him reproachfully.

THE SHAN VAN VOCHT

"What was that I cot ye with last night ? Oh, ye may well blush. A book about a bad woman. Sure didn't I throw the tail of me eye into it and God knows what Father Casey'll say to me when I go to confession."

Shaun looked confused. And indeed he was blushing like a girl. But he pulled himself together :

"Sure if it is of 'Mrs. Warren's Profession' you're talkin', that was a lovely book."

"But is it a book ye can talk to your poor ould mother about, Shaun ? Tell me that." And Mrs. Brophy looked at her son as much as to say that she had him there.

The door opened to let in a boy of perhaps eighteen years, who with a dutiful "Good mornin,' ma'am !" threw his cap on to the table and a big magazine pistol after it. He was a beautiful boy with lightsome grey eyes, and he wore the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the lapel of his coat.

"That's the ninth," he said with an air of duty done. "And, Shaun, ye'll have to get your mother to hide it for me until next time."

"Your ninth what ?" asked the old lady reproachfully, and without waiting for an answer, went on : "I know what you've been doin', Jimmy Higgins, you've been shootin' peelers again. 'Tis gettin' a habit with you."

"'Twas a Black and Tan this time," said the

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

boy, sullenly. "A great shot, too," he added, brightening up again.

"Oh, that's different," said the old lady.

"But I've come to tell ye something, Shaun. What's all this about Honora Moriarty. She's disappeared."

"There ye have it," said Shaun's mother with conviction. "That's what comes of gallivantin's and goin's on. And she once the honest woman that I knew well—as purty a girl as between here and Cape Clear. She that had the loveliest blue eyes you ever saw with a smile behind them like the sun coming through the mists on Slieve Bloom at the break o' day. Well, what is Ireland comin' to at all, at all ?

"Oh, ye needn't be whisperin' to Shaun there about it in the corner," said the old lady. "I know all about it."

"'Tis that bastard MacGuire," said Shaun briefly. "He's in everything."

"Well, I'll be walkin'," said Jimmy Higgins as he picked up his cloth cap.

"Won't ye have a cup of tay before you go, alannah ?" asked Mrs. Brophy, who had what she called a "weakness" for the boy.

"No thanks, ma'am, I've had me breakfast," he answered with dignity. "Maybe you wouldn't like to dhrink tay wid a murderer." Something still rankled in his young breast.

"Murder ? Who's talkin' about murder ? But all the same, alannah, don't make a habit of

THE SHAN VAN VOCHT

it. It's a bad habit killin' policemen even though they're 'G' men and spies itself. And it's a dangerous habit. But come now, and have a drop of tay to strengthen you afther your night's work." She looked with approval at the holy badge in his buttonhole.

The boy's grey eyes under their delicately pencilled dark brown brows, lighted up. "Well, ma'am, I will, and thank you kindly."

And so the little brown teapot which stewed on the hob day and night and which, with the little pasty piece of malnutrition called "bread" and the bit of butter which was the staple food of the Brophys, mother and son, and of four million Irish people on the top of them, came out, and they drank the tea that you could stand a spoon up in, it was so strong.

There was a knock at the door again. It was Sheilah Shaw.

She went up to Shaun's mother to kiss her tenderly on the withered old lips. And the old woman placed an arm about her neck to pull her down and to kiss her again, and yet again.

"Now, Jimmy, there you are," said Sheilah. "What have you been doin' ? Shooting policemen again ? Or is it Black and Tans, this time ?"

"He killed wan last night," said Mrs. Brophy, the old grey eyes lighting up fiercely. "Sure wasn't me man a Fenian in the ould days and a member of the Brotherhood ? For what would I be tellin' the young men to thry another thrack.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

But I'm sick and sorry all the same—and he but a young boy.”

“But their lives are the only thing they have to give for Ireland,” said Sheilah Shaw, as though that settled the matter.

“I think I'll be walkin’,” said Jimmy rising and taking up his cap as he spoke, to go out.

As the door closed behind him, the old lady rose to her feet, and with a dignified : “Well, you'll be havin' something to say to Shaun,” she passed behind the curtain, which screened off the farther corner behind the door, and which was her bedroom.”

“Shaun,” whispered Sheilah quickly, as Mrs. Brophy disappeared, “do you know that Honora Moriarty has vanished ? ”

“That's what young Jimmy was sayin' this minute,” said Shaun.

“We're both wanted for a jaunt to the West again. Sergeant MacGuire has also disappeared and they believe he's gone to the West, as a man like him was seen getting into the train at Broadstones.”

“I know that,” said Shaun. “I was the man that saw him.”

“But he had another man with him. Jasper Moriarty.”

“I know that, too,” said Shaun, breathing hard on a cup to take a stain out.

As she looked at Shaun as he went on drying the cups and saucers, she wondered to herself whether

THE SHAN VAN VOCHT

there was anything that Shaun the Watcher didn't know. She never knew what he knew or didn't know, for even with her he was secret as the grave.

"Well, we're both down to watch the two of them," said Sheilah. "And we've another bit of work. Brian Boru is starting on his tour of the West in a week to prepare the people down there for the negotiation table. Our business is to follow him up with Republican literature and meetings."

"Oh my God! That bloody bastard! saving your presence," said Shaun with disconcerting suddenness. "And Ireland—where is she in all this with two camps in Sinn Fein and double sets of spies? I wish to God I was out of the whole bloody business." Shaun did not apologise the second time.

"Well, we're in for it and so we must go through with it. But I ask meself again as I did the day of the Risin': for what is it we are fightin'?"

"I don't know, Shaun," Sheilah replied quietly. "The ways of Ireland with her sons and daughters, like the ways of God, are past finding out. But it comes to me that soon we shall have to fight not only the English but half of our own people. We must save Ireland from herself."

"What is 'herself'?" asked Shaun, closing one eye and humming to himself in the minor:

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

For what is your secret, oh Mollie Machree ?
Are ye saint, or are ye sinner, oh say the word to
me.

For your face it shines bright as the dawn on
Galtee,

*But your heart, may Christ blast it ! is as black
as the sea.*

“Ireland is one thing, Shaun, the Irish people
another,” said Sheilah.

PART III

The Blowing

CHAPTER XXI

THE BLACK NIGHT

THE night was pitchy black there under the trees on the road to Gurt. The skies were moonless and between the stars and the earth there hung a pall which showed them faint and remote.

From where he was standing under the trees this April night, so heavy that it seemed to bear him down, Jasper Moriarty could hear the tinkle of a waterfall that plashed its way through the dark night. Somewhere in the distance came the low of a sleepy cow, whilst overhead an owl whooped through the gloom.

They said the road under the arching trees was full of ghosts and that there were times when a man could not walk forward owing to the press of the unseen forms in the "Dead Man's Walk" as the place was known. Of course that was nonsense. No sensible man believed in such things.

But all the same, Jasper Moriarty shivered a little under his coat of stout frieze. There was no knowing. He was one sort of man in the day and another in the night.

He had always been two men if it came to that.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

There were the spirits of the dead, for instance. He believed in them and he did not believe. There was God and the blessed saints and the Virgin Mary—and there was nothin' at all, not even a banshee.

'Twas queer how hard it was for a man, even a sensible man like himself, to shake off those things. Sometimes he believed in them and believed haggardly and with retchings of spirit. And then sometimes he didn't—and in those moments he would blaspheme Christ and defy the Devil.

Well, no sane man could believe those old tales. He had read what he had read—and there were the Rationalist Press Association's books. How well he remembered the first time one of those grey ghosts of books was put into his hands by a man that came to sell a small collection down on the quay. It had come with an extraordinary mixture theological. There was Thomas à Kempis's "Imitation of Christ"—and how that had gripped him and how he had nearly gone into a monastery on the strength of it. And there were "The Lives of the Saints" and the story of Saint Francis d'Assisi—that man he used to think he was like—the young fast-living soldier who became a holy disciple of his Master . . . and . . .

What was that ?

He could hear a steady clonk-clonk in the distance. But it was only a donkey, maybe, with a shoe loose, grazing by the roadside.

THE BLACK NIGHT

Now nervy he was.

And who wouldn't be nervy ? Here was that swine MacGuire coming from Galway to take him out on the road to Hennessy's farm—Hennessy, the man who had been in love with his sister Honora before MacGuire struck under her and a man that the gallant sergeant hated—for Pat Hennessy knew too much about the sergeant from the time when he had been in the English army, quartered in the sergeant's district. Sure, didn't he, Jasper Moriarty, know every foot of the place and wasn't that why he had been chosen for this new piece of work ? It was a sort of Castle test, just as Aloysius O'Keeffe in that last meeting at Sheilah's had prepared for him another sort of test on the other side.

Well, he had to go through with it. He was sorry for Pat Hennessy, all the same. But it couldn't be helped.

Hennessy was the ex-soldier who had become a violent Sinn Feiner and he suspected of being one of the Republican centres down in the West. They were going to raid Hennessy's house, only the two of them, he and the sergeant, with Doolan and Phelan outside as watchers, for the Castle wanted no fuss. They had their information—wasn't it wonderful how the Castle for all its blundering did get its information ? Well, who could trust anybody, anyhow ?

There came the clonkety-clonk of the ass through the night, on its back, showing dimly in the shadows, a sort of gawky boy, one shoulder

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

up and the other down—an eerie looking figure which, to his trembling “Good-night” let out of itself an eldtrich laugh that echoed through the tunnel of the trees.

Instinctively Jasper’s hand went up to his forehead to cross himself. “A village idiot perhaps . . . one of those half crazed creatures to be found in every village of the West—but maybe something not of earth.”

There was something about that figure that sent the shivers through him—something of immanent threat—something more than ghost.

But it had passed and no harm come.

But there, thank God, was the tinkle of the waterfall and the air heavy with the night scents. He saw the white scut of a rabbit as it bolted across the road with a thin shape of wickedness sliding after it—a weasel. God be with the times! But how he used to love this road when he was a boy come down from Dublin to visit Hennessy’s father with his sister. That was the way that Honora and Pat grew to care for each other . . . until that swine came between them.

And now Honora had disappeared. Maybe Hennessy could tell him something about her, for he did not reply to his letters. And she goin’ to have a child by the sergeant. A prime boy. And the sergeant boasting of it everywhere. Sure that was why he agreed to come wid the sergeant to the West—that, and what he had to do.

THE BLACK NIGHT

He clasped the revolver in his pocket.

But Pat had to be sacrificed like all the 'rest, only that he, too, might be avenged in the end. Sure if he, Jasper, hung back now, the Castle would throw him and where would his chance be then? Oh! there was the long reckonin' with MacGuire.

But he didn't want to put his own neck in the noose, although—and he knew it to be true—he would willingly die if he could first send MacGuire to hell. What, if he did it that night?

But there would be two other men watching outside the house, and if he came out without the sergeant, why he knew they would arrest him and send him to the gallows, under the hanging noose of which he had lived day and night ever since that time in the Viaduct house. For even these people did not trust him. He was fated to go through all the world and never be trusted.

“Good evenin', Moriarty!”

The voice came from behind him. Well, there was a hell of a fellow for you. The fine big buck sergeant with his rubber-shod feet had stolen up on him unbeknownst and he sunk in his thoughts!

There was a big laugh on the gallant sergeant's face and Jasper could catch the gleam of blue eye over the heavy moustache. A fine figure of a man.

“Well, we've got the night, Moriarty, all right,” he said. “Why I could have put six inches of cold steel between your shoulders and

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

you never knowin' you were dead. Now, where's this cursed house you say you know so well ? ”

“ Down the boreen there on the right and then to the left and then foreninst you,” answered his companion.

“ And you're sure there's nobody in the house but Hennessy ? ”

“ Sure as death,” said the other. “ And what's more, not a soul within a couple of miles. The old woman who comes in every day to do the cleaning for Hennessy goes away after she has done—for Hennessy is a sort of recluse, a man who hates society. The man who works the little farm with him lives a couple of miles away and comes in every morning. Wasn't I down there for a fortnight in the summer to get me nerves right and don't I know.”

“ All the same,” said the big policeman, “ I wish we had put Doolan in the hay-rick for a couple of days to watch the place before raiding it and we only arrived this evening. But my instructions are explicit—the raid has to be made to-night.” The sergeant pulled at his big moustache.

“ Yes, and maybe Hennessy has the good reason for living alone,” he went on. “ If we get hold of these papers, Moriarty, we're made men. It's worth five hundred of the best and you shall have your share. It means London for me.”

“ And hell for me,” said the other.

“ What do you mane by that ? ” asked the sergeant, staring at him.

THE BLACK NIGHT

"Never anything in the world but a joke," said Moriarty.

"Oh, that's all right. I suppose you're thinking of Sinn Fein. But ye gave me the shivers for a minute, Moriarty. You do that same sometimes, be cripes! There's something creepy about you."

"Here come the two boys," he said as two tall policemen, their caps pulled well down over their eyes and in iron grey capes, came out of the night treading silently in their rubbers.

"Now, remember, boys, no killin' if it can be helped," said Sergeant Michael MacGuire. "Your business is to watch the house, front and back, from the hay-rick and the spinney, and prevent interference. We've got to take Hennessy alive if we find what we want. Only don't take chances. If he tries any funny work, shoot to kill and don't wait to blow on your powder."

The big men grunted acquiescence.

The four tall figures moved up the road and disappeared in the jaws of the little boreen that ran out from the right. Once a blackbird flew shrieking out of a hawthorn as they passed it, causing Moriarty to stop dead.

"My God! I thought it was 'the banshee,'" said Doolan.

They came to an iron gate to see the dim outline of a little house without a light showing.

The sergeant pulled his peaked cap down over his eyes and pulled out a white cloth from his side pocket which he turned around the lower

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

part of his face to completely disguise himself, though leaving the mouth free. He knew, none better, the danger of being recognised in a raid, and he took no chances did Sergeant Michael Macguire.

"I'll go first to reconnoitre," said the sergeant.

He stole across the yard in the shadow of the stone wall.

He knew that Hennessy had been up in Dublin but had returned to the West the same evening. He had given the slip to the "G" men who had seen him get out of the train at the terminus. One thing at least was certain—nobody had seen him hold communication with the Sinn Fein chiefs.

Somebody said that he had gone back by car and that a woman, closely veiled, had accompanied him. But who could believe all the lies poured into the Castle every day and from every police barracks in Ireland? You couldn't blame the peelers—they came to the hand that fed and they gave the owner of the hand what it asked for—"information"—some false, some true—but information. The Castle believed this story anyhow. Behind the women of the Cumann was Kitty the Divil, the woman that had been out in the Risin', and they knew that Kitty had certain papers and she as likely as not giving them to Hennessy to hide and his farm so far away from all things.

As he thought these things, he stole up to the little window on the right of the door to peep

THE BLACK NIGHT

under the torn blind where it had been lifted a few inches, the only window that could open.

A woman was bending down in the corner under the little night-light—so tiny as to be almost invisible from the outside and which was covered from all sides save one by its little shade. The light fell dimly on the dark brown hair as she knelt in the corner in her night-dress before a statue of the Virgin and Child which stood on a little table. The light just showed the tiny statue in miniature like a life-size figure a long way off and the back of the young woman's head. Nothing more.

But it wasn't Kitty the Divil, anyhow—for Kitty wore her hair short and it flamin' like hell itself.

The policeman, looking through the window, caught the outline of somebody in the bed.

That'd be Hennessy himself. But wasn't he the boyo to bring a woman back with him—well, there ye had it—weren't all men the same where women were concerned? He laughed behind his big moustache, a damned roguish smile, did Sergeant Michael MacGuire.

Then, as his eye turned again to the woman, whose head had something familiar in it, all those amiable little weaknesses which made the sergeant the gallant fellow he was, stole out from their lairs like thieves of the night. Wasn't it a bloody black night and he the cock of it!

He smiled to himself as he tugged again at his moustache to think quickly.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Things could be done and were done that never came to the ears of the authorities, who, indeed, to give them their due, were very lenient. But all the same, there was the strictest warning about interfering with the women of Sinn Fein. There had been one or two bad cases which had nearly got through to the world outside and that would never do. There was America. . . .

But she was a fine young woman, and maybe not so inaccessible, and the thought, bad cess to it! had stolen into his heart and wouldn't go out again. And he never could resist a petticoat. And who was to know?

There was only Jasper Moriarty, and even if the woman screamed he'd only think he was searchin' her for the papers. He'd keep the other two outside, some distance from the house, and if Jasper suspected and threatened to tell, why, he had a double hold on him, a double noose if it came to that—one with the Castle and the other with Sinn Fein. There wouldn't be much talkin' from Jasper when he threatened to have him hanged for the Viaduct business or to tell on him to the "I.R.B."—to tell them he was a Judas—sure didn't they believe it already. And there were many ways to send the information without gettin' himself dragged in.

The black sergeant took sudden resolve.

He crept back to his companions.

"Listen, Moriarty," he said with sudden authority: "I'm going to leave Doolan and Phelan out here to watch the house front and back

THE BLACK NIGHT

and to give warning of any interference from the outside—and we'll do the searchin'. This fellow Hennessy has a woman wid him—somebody he brought from Dublin, that I heard tell of though I didn't believe it—and we must get the woman away from him—they make so much fuss. And, be cripes ! I believe she has the papers for which we are lookin'.

“ They've got a little night-light, and the first thing to do is to shoot out the light so that we have the dark to do our work in until we have secured Hennessy. We can then make our search. He won't dare light it again if we cover him from the window, and he can't make for the door for the door is the only outlet and it is opposite the window and my electric torch here can be thrown on it.

“ Moriarty, you'll wait at the window with the torch on the door until you hear me whistle from the back, when you are to rush round to me at once, leaving Phelan to watch the window from the hayrick. Do you understand ?

“ All right,” said Moriarty, as he put his mask on over his eyes and looped it behind his ears.

“ Wid that mask Hennessy won't know you at all,” said the sergeant, “ at least so long as you keep your mouth shut. As you were old pals, you won't want him to recognise you. When you rush round to me, I'll put you as a guard outside his door, and under no circumstances are you to stir from your post until I relieve you. And give Phelan your torch. Is that clear ? ”

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"Clear enough," said Moriarty. "There's nothing holdin' the back door but a bit of a wooden bolt."

They crept up to the window, but just as they reached it the light was put out.

Then the voice came out of the night :

"Don't make a move, Hennessy," came the voice through the slightly open window in a hoarse whisper that disguised it effectively. "The back is watched and we have the door covered from the window. At the first movement, we fire. Don't light anything. Do you hear ? "

The stifled cry of a woman was heard. "I hear," came a man's voice.

"The woman will get out of bed and go into the passage and so into the kitchen whilst you and your room are searched, but not until I give the word inside the passage," said the voice again, still in that whisper everywhere used by the police searchers to prevent the recognition which sooner or later meant death.

Leaving Moriarty to watch the window with his torch and pistol, Sergeant MacGuire went round to the back and with a couple of thrusts of his great shoulder forced the door. He whistled, and the next moment Jasper Moriarty was by his side.

The passage was black as a wolf's throat as the sergeant and Moriarty entered.

"You go as guard now on Hennessy's door," said the sergeant, "whilst I examine the woman

THE BLACK NIGHT

in the kitchen. The chances are that he's given her the papers to hide as they all do. He'll probably give her them to tie round her body, hoping to get them away when she comes out.

"Come out and go into the kitchen and don't utter a syllable if your life means anything to you," he commanded outside the man's door, still in that hoarse whisper.

The form of a woman could be dimly seen in the passage, clothed only in a shawl which she had put over her night-dress. Her face they could not see. It was too dark for that.

Without a word, she passed them to turn into the kitchen, whilst Moriarty stood outside Hennessy's door to mount guard. "Don't move from your post under any circumstances, whatever you hear," said MacGuire again. "I hold you responsible for Hennessy."

The young girl saw the great figure fill up the door for a moment in the faint light that came through the little square of kitchen window.

"I want to examine you," said the man with a laugh, and still whispering, "but if you cry out or utter a single word I'll knock your brains out, me sweet *colleen*," he added with an access of sudden brutality.

Hell's alive, but the place was as black as the grave and the night heavy and full of whisperings. But the devil was in him and he in the dark night—and 'twas the dark night that always put these divilments in him—he and his blood flamin' in him.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

The big man went over to her, there where he felt she was, for he could scarcely see her.

"I want something from ye," he said, "but it's not papers." And he laughed again.

She, still silent, shrunk away from him as though paralysed with fear—shrunk away into the blackness and he groping after her and the scent of her in his nostrils.

She shrunk backwards until she felt the dresser behind her, and then, as she tried to move sideways, he had put out his great hands to clutch her and was smothering her.

"Don't do anything to me," she said, "I have a child coming."

But the man, his blood flaming in him, had put one great hand over her mouth to still her raucous whisper, her voice strangled through fear.

Then she screamed. The cry of a soul in agony that tore the blackness like the rending of a garment which came to the ears of the man on watch outside the door up the passage.

But Moriarty would not listen. He dared not. God damn it! the torch was with Phelan. If he gave way now and let the man on the bed inside escape, he was finished and his neck in the noose without the chance of getting at the sergeant. But that was the queer scream.

The woman screamed again.

There was a long silence.

The man on guard outside the door of the bedroom heard a scrambling in the passage and the sound of a woman's voice :

THE BLACK NIGHT

“ I’ll know who the man is that did this thing to me and I with a child comin’ and my husband of a day lyin’ beyond in there. Oh ! Pat ! Pat ! my husband ! I *will* know ! ”

Jasper hearing the voice started like a man possessed. There was the striking of a match and the woman had snatched the cloth away from the sergeant’s face and had held the match up to it.

The face which the light showed was the face of Honora Moriarty.

And then Jasper Moriarty had made a step towards the big man. There was the sound of waters in his ears and down he crashed on the stone floor.

CHAPTER XXII

“THE STONE JUG”

JASPER MORIARTY returned to Dublin from the West in the middle of June, after lying for a month in a Galway hospital in a raging fever after that night at Gurt. His hair almost white, his eyes sunken, he moved shadow-like through the Dublin streets.

“The hand of God is on him,” said Shaun’s mother when he came to visit her one June evening when the summer sun shone into the room in Faddle Alley and the peace of God lay over Dublin town, where men were dying.

It was about her son, for a new trouble had come upon the old woman. Shaun had been “taken” and put into Mountjoy Gaol without by your leave and without any charge being brought against him. All over Ireland during “The Terror,” young men were being taken and put into gaol without charge, lying there from month to month and rotting with gaol fever—a fever not of the body but of the mind. It was the Castle method. Cat and mouse.

When a young man was “troublesome” or suspect, the best place for him was in “the stone

“THE STONE JUG”

jug.” Sometimes you let him out for a little bit and sometimes you didn’t—but moscha! wasn’t that the cunning way of handling the boys?

But Shaun was Shaun. He had always been a terrible obstinate boy and the divil himself couldn’t turn him from a thing once he was set on it—not even his poor old mother that he loved, so how could the British Empire do it?

He had told the judge who put him away that he would either come out a free man or a dead man. And now he was on hunger-strike. He had been on hunger-strike for a month and he wasn’t dead yet but he was dyin’ and his heart in two pieces the doctors said.

Ah! what was the use of Jasper Moriarty tryin’ to plead with her to go into him in Mountjoy to get him to put a bite or sup between his lips? Didn’t she know Shaun?—and even if he would do it for her, then she wouldn’t! She’d rather see Shaun in his coffin than surrender. His father didn’t flinch when they put him over against the guns at the bottom of the Ballynahinch Hill when the troubles were there before, and why should Shaun? You had only wan body—but your sowl for ever! Better save your sowl even if you lost the world.

But Sergeant Michael MacGuire didn’t think of it in this way at all as he sat in his room inside Dublin Castle.

This was a terrible business entirely, was how it struck the sergeant. Everybody was hearing

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

of Shaun Brophy the common labourer that defied the British Government and promotion waitin' for him, Sergeant MacGuire, if he could only get him to take the wan bite that would mean surrender. Weren't the wires red-hot with the news of him every day and all the night and America looking at him and India and God knows what else. There were the eyes of White and Brown and Yellow focussed on that grim grey pile and on the man lying on the pallet inside—all watching wan man against an Empire—God damn him!

Hadn't he, Michael MacGuire, told that swine of hell, Moriarty, that the thing should never have happened. It was all because of that bloody big fool of a man up there in the Castle who, instead of takin' the boy aisy and sayin' nothin', had opened up his mouth and told the reporters of the American papers that it was either the life of Shaun Brophy or the prestige of the British Empire—and now the issue was clinched. Now, if Jasper would only go to Shaun's mother, maybe the matter could be arranged. Didn't everyone know that he, Sergeant MacGuire, was a great diplomatist and if he settled this thing, then London and promotion wouldn't be far off.

Of course he knew that Jasper had been queer in the head since that unfortunate night at Gurt, when his own weakness had got the better of him, and when Jasper had fallen down in the passage in a dead faint with his nerves not strong enough for the Castle business. But what was

“THE STONE JUG”

the use of talkin' ? Wasn't he ready and willin' to marry the girl and he goin' backwards and forwards to the West in charge of the Secret Service there—a big step up—and wouldn't she be the proud woman to have a man like him and he high up with the authorities ?

At the same time, he could not get Jasper Moriarty out of his head that time he was sick and he ravin' and callin' down heaven and hell on him, Michael MacGuire, and he strapped to his bed. But that was only in his madness. When the sickness passed the madness passed, and now it was little the mistake with his sister seemed to trouble him.

And hadn't he been tryin' for a month to get Honora to say the word and Pat Hennessy out of the way and he down in the big kiln in powder with the lime itself ?

He had told the Castle privately that Hennessy had been shot whilst trying to escape and that to avoid trouble in getting rid of the body on a dark night in hostile country, and he miles from Galway barracks, that they had thrown the body into the old lime-kiln. But he didn't want Sinn Fein to know that, for they wouldn't believe him anyhow and he had quite enough on his conscience without that and he a marked man.

And sure wasn't the story true in a way. Hadn't he turned his back for a moment to talk to Doolan and given him the chance to run for it—wasn't it an old trick and wasn't Hennessy a fool to fall into the trap—and hadn't he hit him

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

fair between the shoulders as he ran and the moon out and nobody there but Doolan, for Phelan he had left behind with Jasper Moriarty. And hadn't Doolan and himself thrown the body into the kiln so that there would be no trace—and sure the Castle didn't ask too many questions and Hennessy was a dangerous man—and what was worse, he knew too much about him, Mike MacGuire, from the ould days when he, Hennessy, was in the army, to be good for him.

But there was Doolan. Well, if Doolan threatened to tell on him, hadn't he the way to stop his mouth—he that knew too much about Doolan and for Doolan.

Oh! when all was said and done, wasn't he the clever boyo? Well, a man wid a head on his shoulders could always make his way in the world and avoid the consequences.

For he was mad on that girl and he'd put away a dozen Hennessys to get her. It was queer how the fit tuk a man sometimes! There was the time when he wouldn't marry her and she dyin' for him to make her the honest woman—and she marryin' Hennessy at the last minute to save her name—and now he'd sell the heart of his sowl to get her with her eyes like stars and she like a nun with shinin' eyes looking into the gates of heaven, and the lovely white flesh with the pink showin' through the white—she, the first woman he'd ever wanted to marry, and that after he'd had his will of her. And wouldn't it strengthen his position with the Castle that didn't

“THE STONE JUG”

care too much for these wild gallivantin' bachelor rovers—not for the high positions at laste.

But she, livin' up there alone in the little farm with their child—she wouldn't look at him, even the wrong way. But he had his hopes. Sure, didn't he know the women?

And here was Jasper Moriarty visitin' Mrs. Brophy every day tryin' to get her to interfere with that hunger-strike business and the divil a word out of the ould rip.

And the Castle—a bloody set of rotters—botherin' him every day and askin' him where his authority was wid all his boasting and the Dublin streets full of cryin' prayin' crowds and the very corner-boys goin' down on their knees and makin' a scandal before the world. Well, he'd have wan more thry with Shaun and bring Jasper with him to the gaol. Sure, weren't them two always together in the ould days? So up to Mountjoy wid them now.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HUNGER-STRIKE

AS Jasper Moriarty went through the Dublin streets towards Mountjoy, it was to see a little ragged boy streaming past in bare feet a-patter through the mud of the Dublin streets, a poster clinging to him as he ran, and screaming at the top of his voice : “ Stop-Press ! Shaun the Watcher’s last Words ! Castle’s Bloody Murder ! ”

The passers-by bought the Stop-Press eagerly, throwing the youngster their pence as he rushed past, still howling. They tore at the pale pink sheet with its scanty news, most of it local—the same sheet they had bought half an hour before save for “ the latest ”—that hectic flame upon which Ireland fed.

The sober citizens of Dublin gathered in eager knots and exchanged notes. Their eyes were bright and their mouths a little slavering, as they pored over the latest sensation that was to them meat and drink.

“ A dam fool, I call him ! ” they heard a respectable merchant say. “ Killin’ himself for nothing—and he and his ‘ right of trial,’ indeed ! ” And

THE HUNGER-STRIKE

then a charwoman, the suds still fresh on her red arms as she laid down her bucket of water : “ I don’t hold with Sinn Fein, and, anyhow, I do say that it’s a sin for a man to refuse honest food.”

There you had it now. As Jasper listened, it came to him how little the Irish people knew of the reason of the things that were done for Ireland. You could sweat your guts out for Ireland and not one in a hundred would know why you did it, and you could die for Ireland and only make half a dozen lines in the “ Stop-Press ” of a Dublin rag—unless you died in the way that caught the tinder of the imagination of the Irish, when they’d maybe give you a couple of pages and a funeral as long as the road to glory. It was for these Dubliners just a great show—a free entertainment.

When the boys were shot in Mountjoy after the Risin’, which one of the Dubliners understood—or for that matter how many of their own countrymen understood ? The boys they had jeered the day before they cheered the day after when they heard the sound of the volleys shooting out the brave young lives. It had caught their imagination.

And yet, hadn’t it caught something else ? Hadn’t it caught that secret mind—Ireland’s secret mind—that subjective mind which was the secret of the Irish psychology ? The thing that despite all scepticism, all jeering, flung itself upwards over the threshold of consciousness when

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

the call came—to astonish the world—and Ireland? The Irish were a subjective race—not an objective. They were dominated as no other race by that Secret Thing that some men called the unconscious mind and some called God.

But wasn't that all nonsense, if you only faced the facts? Sure, only a fool would die for Ireland. He had found it all out in time.

But had he? Wasn't his heart with that poor boy that he had known so long, the only wan of them all that he believed in and trusted and almost loved, lyin' in there behind the stone walls defyin' the might of an Empire? Wasn't his heart still with Ireland in spite of himself?

Well, who could say. He knew nothin' about Ireland and less about himself.

There he lay, and as the people said, in love with that woman that had thrown him, Jasper Moriarty, to his fate—that woman whom he hated now more than other human being—more than MacGuire. Sheilah Shaw, the woman widout a heart that had kept him waiting through the long years and sayin' that she loved him and then refusin' to take the road out wid him and it waitin'. She and her Ireland—the Ireland of a crazy pack—a crew that never knew its own mind from one generation to another—no, nor from one day to another!

He hadn't forgotten that last time in the studio when she had called him a "Judas"—she callin' him a Judas and she, as he knew now from that

THE HUNGER-STRIKE

big brute of a sergeant, on his thrack so long ago as that time in Ennis when she asked him to confess everything in "The Sunburst."

"Confess?" Who was she that he should confess? He had nothing that time to confess—but, be Christ! he had somethin' to confess now—and he'd have more, please God, before he was done.

If he could only put her away into one of England's gaols for a few years, he'd be even with her—and not then. What'd be the good of shootin' her—she that cared nothing for her life?—But to let her rot in gaol? That would break the proud spirit of her and leave her to wear out life and hope. She, that had said the day he turned Judas he'd have to reckon with her, his lost love. "His lost love." That was right, anyhow.

He had his plans if she had hers.

But here was a tramcar. That would be the best way to get through the crowds.

And look at that little comfortable pot-bellied shopkeeper poring over his Stop-Press in the tram. What was that he was sayin' to his friend? "Ah, why can't these Shaun the Watchers stop their silly nonsense—seeking notoriety and makin' fools of themselves? Why can't Sinn Fein give us peace to make our little profits?"

There you had it again! MacDonagh's "great inert mass" as he had called them and he on his way to the firing squad—the great inert dead

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

mass of the shopkeepers who cared no more for Ireland than Timbuctoo and who would sell their dirty little shopkeeping souls for a few half-pence. Those were the people who in the days of the Land League when he was a boy, in their comfortable snuffy patriotism would put a few lighted candles in their windows with a picture of Parnell between them and would think that in doing so they had done all their duty as Irishmen. The dirty cowardly bourgeoisie!

God! what a throng of people in the streets. How in the name of heaven would he be gettin' into Mountjoy to make his last appeal to Shaun Brophy—and the Sergeant gone before him? Weren't the crowds thickenin' the farther they went forward. Now they had to stop whether they liked it or not. And there were the men the women and the little childer streamin' past and they all with the Republican colours in their buttonholes.

Why, there was old Mrs. Brophy herself. He could see her through the window of the tram in her decent shawl and white frilled cap pressing her way forward like a young woman amidst the crush, with that short fat umbrella in the two hands of her. And look at her with the tricolour in her shawl and she pressin' forward, her old grey eyes aflame. Ah, if the others had only been like her?

Now where the crowd had swirled she was down and then up again with her umbrella gripped firmly to her old body. What a spirit the old

THE HUNGER-STRIKE

ones had after all—and the young ones laughing at them !

Now he must get out of the tram. The last couple of hundred yards would have to be on foot.

What was that shuddering in the air—a sort of tremblement ?

But always the people pressing past him in that strange silence. Here, at any rate, there was none of the laughin' and talkin' of ten minutes ago with the "Stop-Press." This was a new kind of spirit—maybe it was that unconscious soul of Ireland finding itself.

The Irishman was two things—conscious and unconscious—anyone could see that. The conscious side of him was the laughin', jeerin', sceptical side ; but the other—well the other always beat true for Ireland and neither hell nor England could stop it. That was Ireland's secret. Sure, wasn't he two men himself ?

The sunny June air was murmurous with the lift and fall of something that might have been a requiem. A great wave of sound that came and went and blended with the thrud-thrud of the great aeroplane which swept resistlessly round and round above the heads of the crowd.

And now there was a check and he found himself jammed near a high wall behind a telegraph pole. On the top of the wall a man in rags was standing holding aloft in one hand the Republican tricolour and in the other a blue banner of the Blessed Virgin, whilst beneath him the

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

thousands stood bareheaded to say the Rosary in Irish. And never a chance to reach Shaun.

There he stood, a beggarman who was a priest—a tall man with a long beard, barefooted, and a straw rope around his waist. There was something of royalty in him—a beggar-king, and he a common tramp. Sure wasn't that Ireland herself?

As the beautiful Irish came from his lips, the crowd beneath sung back their answering chaunt as though it were some great Litany. It came out over their heads from the high altar of the wall; circled the crowd; eddied a little, and fell again, in it the sound of agony. And always above, the thrud of the plane.

And now he has pulled himself up a little behind the pole from where he can see over the heads of the crowd without himself being seen. Within twenty yards of him, right in front of a little space which had been cleared before the altar, there knelt an old woman supporting herself with one hand clasped about a short stocky umbrella which she placed like a staff in the road before her, holding her beads partly with a finger of the hand holding the umbrella, partly with her free hand.

It was Shaun's mother. He hated them all, but he couldn't hate that old woman who stood for something out of the reach of even his hate. Queer that in all Ireland there was only her and Shaun that he couldn't hate.

From behind the wall on a stone of which he perched, there came the sound of a laugh.

THE HUNGER-STRIKE

He looked up but could see nobody. The laugh sounded eerie amidst that great prayer, from which not a head turned, all intent upon worship. But something in it, something mocking, swung his thoughts back into the old hateful focus.

Standing a little above the heads of the people, hour after hour and the night now drawing on, he could see far as his eye could span, a great sweep of human heads, with facing him and coming out of the golden gloom of the summer evening the thousands of white faces all staring silently at the grim pile of the gaol before them as though they would draw the dying man out of the hard limestone before them. There they stood, men, women and little children, facing the circle of the tanks and guns of the Tommies, pointing up at God and down at man, threatening heaven and earth, whilst above them thrudded the great plane like some monstrous night-fowl waiting to swoop.

And behind the steel, the round-faced innocent English soldiers, with the glow of their cigarettes coming and going in the gloom, staring at these people in whose midst they were as foreign as though their skins were brown or black.

How he hated them all—hated them with a black hate. If he had the power wouldn't he loose the bombs from that plane to crash down on to the waiting crowd below—all of them—soldiers of England and people of Ireland together—send them to hell in one bloody mess.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

And still the Rosary rose and fell about him, eddied the arc of the crowd and passed to rest again. And still the beggarman stood there, clasping the Green, White and Orange and the virgin blue of Ireland's Lady of Sorrows. And still his eyes would return to the old woman, on her knees, supporting herself by her staff.

As the prayer once more reached its appointed end, out of the silence there came again that haunting laugh. And now, for the first time, the faces about him stared up over his head at the hidden scoffer, so that he himself feared to be recognised—and so he dropped down behind his post.

In that laugh there was all the scepticism of Ireland, all the unbelief, that laughter as of devils which he had heard from childhood—the laughter that destroyed—just as the prayer that showed all her faith. It sounded like the echo of the laughter of his own heart.

It seemed as though that strange unknown who laughed must surely know the soul of the crowd below. His laughter seemed to know that for this night and until Shaun Brophy was released or dead, all the fervent soul of Ireland, white-hot, would be concentrated on the flinty walls of Mountjoy, almost to dissolve the very stones in its fiery heat. . . . And then, after twenty-four hours, all would be forgotten. Sure, wasn't it only at odd times, under the lash of sorrow, that sorrow upon which Ireland's sick soul battered as the serpents in the story that

THE HUNGER-STRIKE

lived on poison, that the unconscious soul of the real Ireland was flogged up above the threshold of consciousness, to find itself for a fleeting moment, only once more to fall backwards into the slough of scepticism and despair—that spirit that could force the gates of heaven, only, as they opened, to fall again into the pit.

And now the white searchlights were sweeping around and over the faces to light up the glare of the eyeballs and the white cheeks, only to let them pass once more into darkness. And overhead, always, the thrud of the plane.

And there, holding their hands interlaced to keep the people back a garland of girls, a living barricade of the women of the Cumann na mBan. There they stood, devotees of that god of country which lived upon the blood and thoughts of its sons and daughters. All of them, like that she-devil Sheilah, who would sacrifice the very desires of their flesh and all the romance and beauty of youth to immolate themselves upon the altar of Ireland—that Circe which under the guise of a beautiful woman, called to death—and in her secret chambers there were dead men's bones.

Ireland calling, always calling. She had called him, Jasper Moriarty, only to call him to death and to worse than death. She had called Sheilah Shaw and Moira O'Rourke and her man, and who knew whether she was not calling them also to death? Only the end of the story would tell that, and no man could be wiser than the future.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

But even now, thinking all that, he could not forget the other Ireland—Eire the gracious lady which sometimes he believed hid herself behind the mask of that other Circe. There was the Ireland that called out from these mad people with their eyes on the gaol, from that man high above him with the banners, looking like a king and stinking like a beggar—there was the Ireland of love and life as well as of hate and death. Once, that was the Ireland which had called him, Jasper Moriarty, and he had tried to answer and to give her all—only to find behind that other, the woman of death.

There was a hush about him and the great lights swung their appointed paths, lighting up the cloud of faces like the dawn of Resurrection Morning. And even the laugh of the man behind the wall was hushed in that silence, heavy with fate.

It came from the outside—a thin muttering, and then a murmur, and then a swelling roar that rushed inwards like a mighty wind—a great *ullahone* to turn that circle of silent faces into a roaring fury, roaring out their joy and pride before the Lord.

For the news had come that Shaun was free—that Ireland could bring out her dead.

And through it all, the old woman knelt there with her umbrella, telling her beads as though in church.

There was a great inbending of the crowd and the little toy soldiers in their little tin helmets

THE HUNGER-STRIKE

looked helplessly on as the people passed through them silently like a whirlwind and up to the outer portal, and through it, to find there on the narrow pallet the body of Shaun Brophy, labourer, the little eyes now large in death and the wasted form like a wraith in its coffin.

Jasper Moriarty was left there alone behind his post.

The night was silent all about him.

From above, came once more that haunting laugh. It rang out hollowly over the great empty space and then died away.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LIME-KILN

FOR nearly a year Jasper Moriarty had been playing the most dangerous game of his life, a game between two camps. Since the night at the Hennessy farm, he was one of the Castle's trusted men, more or less, whilst the explanation he had made to Sinn Fein was apparently believed, for Sinn Fein knew that at least he had no knowledge of the identity of the woman who had fallen into the hands of the gallant sergeant, until it was too late.

Honora Hennessy, after her man had been taken away by Sergeant MacGuire and his companions, had had a child the same night—a couple of months before its time—but saved by the doctor and now a fine boy with the blue eyes and dark hair of his father. The mother lived alone with the boy in the farmhouse and held little communication with the outside world.

The child, she loved passionately and whatever her thoughts about the father might have been, she kept them to herself.

But the father still waxed fat and kicked. Sergeant MacGuire was stationed more or less

THE LIME-KILN

permanently in the West which he knew so well and the one or two attempts which had been made to kill him had failed. For Sergeant Michael MacGuire had the great cunning, and what was even better, was a dead shot with his magazine pistol, as young Pat Lehane had found out to his extreme surprise the day he fired at the sergeant at the Galway fair. He was in his clay almost before he knew enough to know that he had failed and the look of surprise was still on his young face when they picked him up. "There was no havin' that black fox of a sergeant," and the word went round that he had sold himself to the devil, and that he was under the special protection of hell.

But he was the busy man, was the sergeant. He was here, there and everywhere. One day when young Mike McGrath had had a pot shot at him, instead of arresting him, he simply took him home by the ear to his father and mother and told them to give him the strap and for him not to be makin' a fool of himself. Then he had gone away, laughing.

And the girls. Why, the girls simply couldn't resist him and indeed there were many scandals and heartburnings wherever he went. Of course it was true only of the lighter-headed girls, but there you had it and there was no gettin' over it. It was the laugh and the big moustache and the pair of blue eyes like blue swords. "Oh! but he was the lad for the ladies," the people said, half admiringly.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

And yet the bold sergeant was not satisfied. There had come to him one of those queer reactions that overtake even fine fast-living men at times. He had fallen in love, and for the first time in his life.

Instead of straying to fresh pastures, he had fallen in love with no less than his old flame, Honora Moriarty, or Honora Hennessy as she now was, living up there at the old farmhouse with their child, since the shooting of her husband of a day. He had seen the child, and a fine boy he was, very like himself and he had tried to speak to Honora—but what was the good?—she had neither eye nor word for him, and the more she wouldn't the more he would.

Oh! he wanted to do the decent thing and the right thing this time, did Sergeant Mike MacGuire. He was "getting on" anyhow and the time had come for an honest man to be settling down and he with a snug little nest egg saved from the troubles. He had been valuable to the Castle during this last twelve months down here in the West, and it was the Castle that knew how to reward.

Now why wouldn't she be the sensible woman? Sure wasn't he the father of her child—wasn't it he that had struck under her in the first place and wasn't she in love with him that time. And what he had done to her that night of the raid was done in innocence and he not seein' her face in the dark night and she not seein' his and she afraid to speak and he

THE LIME-KILN

hearin' nothin' wance the passion started flamin' in him and his hand over her mouth.

And sure didn't she only marry Pat Hennessy to save her good name and because, as the sergeant now knew, he had come up to Dublin to tell her that he knew all and would marry her if she were to be havin' a hundred children.

But women were the queer creatures, entirely !

And here was the sergeant standing in the day room of the Galway police barracks, looking at a piece of white paper in his warm hairy paw—the paper that had been put in his hand the day before—a little message from her to come up to the house that evening and see her as she had something to say to him. He broke into a slow smile as he looked at it.

Maybe she was willin' to surrender at last.

Ah, 'twas always the way wid the women—first they would and then they wouldn't—and the sergeant pulled at his thick black moustache and laughed a little, but checked himself. 'Twas time to be done wid all that sort of thing.

And here he was on the road to the farm in the June night and passing that queer old limestone quarry and the lime-kiln that had always the tremblement above it where the hot airs rose from the white heated bed of lime, and the kiln this night in full blast with an unsuspected tongue of flame sullen beneath, in the pitchy darkness.

As he passed under the archway of trees where he had found Jasper Moriarty that April night before they made the raid, a queer heavy night,

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

something like this, he shivered a little. The moon was shut out by the heavy cloud-banks and the night on the countryside like a pall. He clapped his hand down on the butt of his pistol, as he entered the Dead Man's Walk. 'That was comforting, anyhow, and be the Powers! he had put the fear of God into all that carrion about. Nobody'd dare look crooked at Sergeant MacGuire to-day—but all the same it was good to have the pistol. Dead men told no tales and lead settled everything.

Here was the *boreen* on the right. He would take no chances but would reconnoitre as he had done that time before. Of course Honora might mean all right, but there was no knowin' and he didn't want any unhappy endings for his little love story.

Well, he'd go over the fence at the side and come at the house from the back. There had been a regrettable nosiness about the authorities in regard to that trouble with Honora and the mistake he had made that night. But how was he to know she had been Honora Moriarty? A man had his blood and when he had, neither saint nor devil could stop him—and that night the black spirit had come on him and he three-parts full.

Over the grass went Sergeant Michael MacGuire in his rubber soled boots and then a detour through the little wood and then back on the other side. It wasn't for nothing he had the name of "the Black Fox."

THE LIME-KILN

The house was dark enough and quiet enough, as dark as that last time he had visited it. His heart was pounding in his veins and it seemed to him that he already had Honora in his arms. Well, there were always risks where women were concerned but it was worth it, and wasn't every drop of hot blood in him cryin' out for her. And didn't he mean to marry her, anyhow?

He crept up to the back. There was no light in the house. Not a sound. And then he had knocked lightly on the door.

Footsteps came along the passage, and there stood Honora herself holding a candle in her hand. Very beautiful she looked, with one thick tress of dark brown hair pulled round to the front and hanging down over the wrap she had thrown about her.

"Is that you, Michael?" she said gently. "I'd given you up and gone to bed."

So that was how it was. Well, there had been no harm in comin' a couple of hours late in case there was any dirty trick goin'. She had gone to bed. So it was all right.

The sergeant laughed a little throaty laugh of satisfaction.

Then he had passed in and taken the girl in his arms and was raining kisses down on her lips and face. For a moment she had pushed him away and then had resigned herself, putting her head down into the great chest.

Oh, but it was Honora that had the queer fascination about her. Her lips were melting

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

and her eyes, and all her being. She always gave him the feelin' that he wanted her to enfold him. He had never felt like that with any other woman.

"Come into the house," said she, and he could see the great flush come into her face as she said it.

But the sergeant wouldn't. The space around the house was bare and in the half hour he had lain in hiding outside he had not heard a sound. But there might be something *in* the house. Now, as long as he stood in the narrow passage near the door, nobody could get at him for there was no window there, and his retreat was clear.

"I won't come in," he said. "Let you come out wid me," and he looked lustfully at her. "We can go down to the stable."

The girl looked at him again, and again that great crimson stained her face.

"Ah, don't be silly, Mike," she said. "You know that I always loved you but you went away from me and me with the child—and what could I do but marry Pat? And I never cared for Pat, as you know well."

That was true, anyhow. And the woman had loved him. But the house was dark and very quiet.

There was the girl blushin' like a young virgin under the candle. It was the blush that nearly overcame him. But still he hesitated. There was something changed in the eyes of her. Something hard and clear. Somehow, she was different.

She came close to him and pressed her young

THE LIME-KILN

body against his. At that contact, with the blood pounding in him, the sergeant forgot everything and followed her from the outside door into the passage after bolting the door. But he gripped his magazine pistol in his right hand and insisted on her going into the kitchen and the little parlour, with their tiny fixed windows, with the lighted candle before they came to her bedroom, the only other room of the house.

He would have taken his shadow, Doolan, with him, but he didn't want that blackguard to know too much and he tryin' to supplant him wid the Castle. Already, hadn't he hinted at tellin' the authorities more about that first night at Hennessy's when he had shot Hennessy, but he had soon stopped that.

As they entered the room, the sergeant first looked under the bed, and then at the little child lyin' in his old wooden cradle at the side. It was the sight of the child that convinced him, somehow, and, as he kept on explaining to Honora, it was not that he didn't trust her—"but who knew what those Sinn Fein devils might be up to unbeknown to herself and they hidin' themselves in all the holes and corners of Ireland?"

There was no place anybody could get in, not an openin' save the little trap-door in the ceilin', and the window—but if a man tried to get in there, he'd be dead before he knew.

Something approaching paternal feeling welled up in the sergeant's breast at the sight of his own flesh and blood. Rovin' wasn't everything. All

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

the same, it was he that was the sure foal-getter ! . . . Now, there he was again, goin' back to the ould ways and the ould thoughts that he was done wid for ever.

"Oh, but 'tis he that is the lovely boy," said the sergeant. "And he's ours. When is it to be, Honora ?" he asked jovially with an earnestness that sat strangely on him.

"Ah, that's for us to talk about, later," she said.

"Kiss me, Michael, like you used to do in the old days." She said it so eagerly, that he stared at her. As their lips met, the blood rushed again to his head.

"Now, Michael, we two must have a talk together, for maybe it's the last talk for a long while."

He knew nobody could be in the house, for he had had it watched ever since yesterday morning so as to be sure—so as to be sure. He wanted nobody in that house that night and he had had his watchers on the roads around, and had only dismissed them an hour or two before, for the fewer witnesses to his private affairs, the better. Nothing had come through save Tom the farm hand with a load of straw. And Tom was home in bed two miles away.

"Michael, you knew that I was fond of you. For what was it that you had your will of me and then wouldn't marry me that time—I, who only wanted to love you and to be loved ?"

"I know that, Honora," he replied. "But

THE LIME-KILN

'twas often a good man's fault." And the sergeant looked ashamed.

"But, now, I'll marry you to-morrow and wid a heart and a half." The sergeant was generous and in the big way.

"Then there was Pat. For what did you give the evidence against him? For what did you do that . . . and what have you done with him?" asked Honora like a woman who wants to be convinced, but cannot.

"I had me duty to do," said the sergeant. "And I can't tell you what became of him—that's a Castle secret. And if I hadn't done what I had to do there were plenty more. . . . But come now, let us forget all that, and give me a kiss." And he made as though to put his arms about her.

"What did you do with my husband?" the girl asked again. "The only official notice I got was that he had been 'killed whilst escaping.' Was it you that killed him, Michael, or was he killed by somebody else, later on?"

"And that's a Castle secret, I tell ye. I don't say I had any hand in it . . . and anyhow the hand that did it, whatever it was, made you free to marry Sergeant Michael MacGuire." And he laughed a little. "Come, give us a kiss. . . ."

"What is that!"

He had jumped away from her to look upwards at the ceiling.

"Only the rats, Mike," said she softly. "The rats that do be runnin' over the floor above."

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

“What a fright they gev’ me,” said the big man, laughing.

The girl glanced upwards once towards the ceiling, and said :

“Kiss me, Michael.”

The man stared at her, her surrender was so complete. The day before and she would have nothing to do with him and now, here you had it. Well, women were the queer creatures—that was all there was about it.

She came a little towards him, for her shawl to fall away by accident to show the soft fulness under the thin nightgown. And then the sergeant had forgotten time and place and everything and had taken her in his arms, whilst the woman he held stared upwards over his shoulder.

A head was looking down from the trap—now open. A white face with a long curling beard and in the face two pale eyes blazing, the irises small and pinched.

And then a body had fallen with crushing force on the back of the sergeant, who, with a great curse, had driven the woman away from him and had wheeled to shake off the thing that clung to his shoulders and clutched at his hairy throat.

As he was breaking clear, he felt something clutch at one of his legs, and it pulled from under him, and on the floor, Honora, gripping his ankle like a wild thing.

Then another and another, man after man vomited forth from the trap until Sergeant

THE LIME-KILN

Michael MacGuire was a heaving mass of bodies clutching and tearing, but all in a dead silence.

The big man lay there on the floor with *sugauns* tying him up head and foot and a pole running through the coils like a skewer through a fowl made ready for roasting, whilst he stared silently at the circle of men about him, one of them Jasper Moriarty.

Without a word, they picked him up to carry him out into the night, the sergeant still silent. But there was an awful look on his face and the olive skin had gone white.

Out into the night they carried Sergeant Michael MacGuire and down the boreen and around by the end to the old lime-kiln now in full blast with the fires underneath glowing sullenly.

And still the sergeant did not speak.

And up the winding spiral car-track that led to the top where the horses carried the limestone for calcining, until they came to the edge of the pit.

The pit was forty feet deep and little limestone in it, and out of the bottom came that queer trembling from the fumes of the lime and the fierce heat.

It was as they laid him down by the edge of the kiln that the sergeant screamed, for the first time :

“What are ye goin’ to do wid me ? ” he asked, looking round on the faces of the men.

But nobody answered him.

Then he cursed bloodily, but still nobody

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

answered him, those about him watching him in silence as he struggled with his ropes.

The great chest heaved and the massive limbs writhed, but the straw ropes held.

Then with the moon sailing clear across a break in the cloudbanks, they watched him as his head fell back, the big swarth moustache of him drooping, his head bare.

The cold sweat glistened on his forehead under the light of the moon.

The head lifted itself again for the eyes to fall on Jasper Moriarty looking down at him very calmly. But his face was white.

And then the eyes had turned to someone who stood a little behind him, a woman.

"Honora! Honora!" he cried at last. And again: "Honora!"

But the woman never answered. The misty blue of her eyes came to him serenely, in the moonlight.

"Don't let them do it to me!" he cried to her. "Ah! don't."

"Don't what, Michael?" she said speaking at last. "Don't let them do what you and Doolan did to Pat the night you took him from here after you had had your will of me?"

"Oh, Honora, for God's, for Christ's sake, forgive me! You know that I love you—that I must always have loved you." But she only looked at him.

The woman made a signal, and the men had picked up the sergeant and placing a thick straw

THE LIME-KILN

sugaun under his arms, had lowered him gently into the pit. Down, down he went, and as he descended, he screamed, again, and yet again.

"Oh! oh! oh!" he cried, urgently.

But the pit muffled the voice of Sergeant Michael MacGuire. Down he passed through the fumes until he rested standing on the floor of the pit. Again he screamed, and then those above saw the straw ropes, under the fierce heat, begin to unroll from him as though by some magic, and then in a moment he was free and striking at the stone walls to tear his hands into bloody strips.

"Oh! oh! oh!" he cried.

Again, and yet again he sprang upwards to escape the torment beneath, and again and yet again he fell back, his face bloody and terrible.

"Leave me, boys," said Honora seating herself near the edge of the pit. "I have something to say to Sergeant Michael MacGuire."

They left her in silence, and as they went down the spiral of the track, they could hear her speaking softly to him.

But what Honora Moriarty said that night to Sergeant Michael MacGuire will never be known until the graves of Ireland give up their dead.

CHAPTER XXV

MAGGIE MCCANN

MR. McCONKEY'S imposing bald head and baby pink face sat enthroned in high state in the dining-room of Fitz-William House maternity home, reading to a cowed and dispirited looking lot.

From the January streets, grimy and cold, came the intermittent cries of "Stop-Press! Stop-Press!" as the newspaper guttersnipes rushed past with the latest sensation.

Like some High King of Tara laying down the law to his broken and warring clans, the old gentleman, holding one crutch in the hollow of his arm like a sceptre, wheezed his way through the columns of the two Dublin papers on his lap, with their picture of clamant factions.

"And now we come to the fly in the Sinn Fein ointment," said he, throwing a glance over his glasses at nurse Donovan's dark little head and face and at Biddy, the little red-headed nurse by her side, a regular fire-eater as he knew. He read out: "The Sinn Feiners are divided among themselves. . . ."

"There ye have it now. The dirty Shinnners

MAGGIE McCANN

are divided among themselves. Wan half of them want to cut the throats of the other half now that the Treaty with England is signed—with Ulster sitting tight up there beyant, sure of herself.

“Well, when the Republicans and Free Staters have started on one another and eaten one another up like the Kilkenny cats, why, Ulster can step in and deal with what’s left. Then, plaze God, we’ll have the Union Jack back in Ireland and an end to all this talk about Home Rule and separation wance and for all.”

From his vantage point, he looked down the row of faces but found no challenge there, save, perhaps from the little red-headed nurse, whose flaming eyes seemed to strike fire from each individual lock of her hair breaking its way out from under her cap.

Mr. McConkey was enjoying himself, for had not the Lord, that ferocious Jehovah of the McConkey Clan, delivered the enemy into his hand? From the street outside there came the cry of “Stop-Press! Stop-Press!”

“But the best of it is to come here in the heel of the hunt. Listen to this:

We are informed by a special correspondent who can be trusted, that Mr. Brian O’Rourke is about to make a tour through the West for the purpose of explaining the conditions of the Treaty with England. As his wife, Mrs. O’Rourke, so well known as one of the chief-

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

tainesses of the Cumann na mBan, which is heart and soul Republican, has been denouncing the signatories to the Treaty as traitors to Ireland, and as we have it on the best authority that she proposes to, so to speak, "trail" her husband in his projected tour through the West, politics in Ireland promise to be exciting. In fact, Ireland, as always, is broken into factions and never more so than at this moment when all is supposed to be "settled."

"Ah, there ye have it again!" said the old fire-eater, rolling the words around his tongue, "each wan tearin' at the other. Sure, was it ever different!"

Mrs. McConkey and Miss Cynthia sat bolt upright as they listened to their lord and master, the mother, prim and virginal as ever and her daughter with that pinched look of the thoroughbred horse which can learn nothing. It was evident, however, that both were enjoying themselves in their own remorseless way.

"What do ye think of that, nurse Donovan," asked the old gentleman, jibingly.

But the little dark head of nurse Donovan, whose "boy" had been shot through the head a month before by a Black and Tan as he was climbing over the wall of the Dublin tenement house where he had been hiding, was bent over her plate. The little indignant woman who five years before in that very room had so quickly taken up the McConkey challenge, was now a

MAGGIE McCANN

broken-hearted little creature, "widout a kick to her," as Biddy had said sarcastically. For all the Sinn Fein nurses had been fighting amongst themselves ever since the signing of the Treaty, divided as they were, into Republican and Free State factions.

All this to the unconcealed joy of freckled nurse McTavish from Belfast, who daily added fuel to the flames of faction, now pretending to side with one, now with the other.

"Well," said the old man, disappointed at not having "drawn" his defeated adversary, "there is more to come. Here is a piece about Sheilah Shaw, who seems to have disappeared and appears to be one of those heading the revolt against the Free State, now that they've laid Aloysius O'Keeffe, the chief of the Republican forces, save the mark! by the heels.

"Oh, they've done it well, this time. 'Tisn't often I have a good word to say for the Free Staters, but Brian Boru is the boy for the dirty Republicans. It takes a big man to put in gaol the men by whose side he was fighting only a few months before . . . and there are those that say the Free Staters won't stop even at shooting them—the fate they deserve, only that I wish the Republicans could do the same to them!"

"Oh, 'tis the price of them!" interjected little nurse McTavish, unable to hold herself in any longer.

Mrs. McConkey at this point broke in with

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

a sharp cough as though to indicate that her spouse had reached the limit of toleration of his hearers, especially as breakfast had only just begun and the temper of that little red-headed devil, Biddy, might not last it out ! She looked with a certain calculating apprehension at the carving knife with which she had been cutting the cold boiled beef for the McConkey tribe and which lay within a hand-reach of the red-headed one, and gently moved it to the other side. At the same time, she could not deny in fairness to herself and to her God that those wretched rebels deserved every bit of it.

Miss Cynthia, fearing a break in the monologue, said with the unctuousness that was her own : " Oh ! but I don't think even the Free State officials would dare to shoot a man like little Aloysius O'Keeffe and his friends. Of course they deserve it, but so, as my father says, do the executioners. And that, also, would be treachery ! . . . But I think we ought not to discuss politics any more." She looked around the table, and especially at the red-headed nurse, to see the effect of her words.

" The one good thing I always said the Government did," her progenitor went on as though she had not spoken, " was in letting Shaun Brophy die on the hunger-strike. The only good Sinn Feiner is a dead Sinn Feiner and the only thing better than a dead Sinn Feiner is two dead Sinn Feiners ! What do ye think of that ? " he asked, throwing the ball to nurse McTavish.

MAGGIE McCANN

"I don't believe in killing or murder," said nurse McTavish catching and returning it. "See what all the Sinn Fein murder-gang policy has done to poor Ireland—it has estranged the world from her. America they tell me is sick to death of her and wouldn't lift a finger to help her if the English soldiers came back to-morrow morning."

"God grant that they may!" ejaculated Mrs. McConkey fervently as though she were saying her prayers. "Then we would have law and order. Everyone knows that the Free Staters who signed the Treaty with England did so with their tongues in their cheeks. They are all rebels to a man and would see the great and glorious British Empire at the bottom of the sea to-morrow if they had the power."

"And doesn't England know that, Chrissy?" asked her partner. "Doesn't every man jack of those who steer the British Empire know that and aren't they allowin' for it all? They're not fools I'm tellin' ye."

"Now here's a bit in the 'Sniper' about that queer fellow Jasper Moriarty. (I bought the paper because someone told me there was somethin' in it to make honest men rejoice," he said apologetically and in parentheses.) "It says that he has resigned the editorship and it more than hints at the reason. Here is the word 'Judas,' and it," he began to count: "one—two—three—four times in the paragraph. Oh, 'tis well they ought to know what Judas's are—they've bred

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

plenty of them—though they are afraid to say it straight out about Moriarty.” He glanced at little red-headed Biddy who, at that instant, took a draught of scalding hot tea which brought the tears to her eyes.

“He knew which side his bread was buttered,” said Miss Cynthia. “I don’t like spies, and even if he is one, what is any decent man to do in a country like this? If he wishes to help his country the only thing open for him is to . . .”

“ . . . is to turn traitor,” said Biddy exploding at last, her words going one way and her tea another.

Mr. McConkey looked triumphant, whilst nurse Donovan smacked Biddy on the back to help her to get her breath again, and smacked her hard. At last they had succeeded in drawing the enemy’s fire and ire. Now there would be a real good fight in a minute.

“‘Traitor’ is the hard word,” he said, adding fuel to the fire with the hand of an expert—a little at a time. “And anyhow, any of these Sinn Feiners could be bought any hour of the day or night.” (Now it was blazing and it was safe to heap the fuel high.) “When a man of the intelligence of Jasper Moriarty sees his country steeped in crime and torture, what is there for him but to go over to England, help to bring about law and order, and save his skin in time?”

“Where was the torture, Mr. McConkey?” asked the red-headed girl coldly.

MAGGIE McCANN

“Torture is it?” asked the old man, his blue eyes blazing. “Did you hear what they did to Sergeant MacGuire, one of the finest and most upstanding men in the Royal Irish Constabulary? Do you know that they say he was thrown into a lime-kiln and burnt to death? There’s your ‘torture’ if ye want it!”

“And what did MacGuire do to our boys before they did that to him? What happened to Pat Hennessy on the road to Gurt? Tell me that. Wasn’t it MacGuire that put him into the same kiln after he had shot him down?”

“Yes, shot him fair between the shoulder-blades,” said little nurse McTavish whose mind was a perfect charnel-house, “when he tried to escape, and hadn’t Sergeant MacGuire a perfect right to do that after they had arrested him?”

“He was shot from the back after he was as good as told to run for it,” said the red-headed nurse. “‘Shootin’ on the run’ is what they call it. An old trick.”

“And how do *you* know that?” asked Mrs. McConkey coldly. It was a fair catch, and the McConkeys gloated over it.

Then the little woman blazed out: “Did ye ever hear what they did to Jasper’s sister Honora at Hennessy’s farm, and her man in the next room?”

“We don’t want any indecent details at this table, Nurse, thank you,” said Mrs. McConkey

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

still more coldly. "These unpleasant stories may be all right for Sinn Fein circles—they are not suited to FitzWilliam House."

"Oh, well, Mrs. McConkey, they did it to her all the same," said nurse Kathleen, the big, soft-faced Free State nurse, for the first time breaking silence against the common enemy. "And it was your friend, Sergeant Michael MacGuire that did it. And if you want proof, one of the men who was present when MacGuire was taken was Dan Burke, the lieutenant of little Aloysius O'Keeffe, who knew all the facts, as did Brian Boru."

"Yes, little Aloysius O'Keeffe who is now in Mountjoy by the orders of his dear friend, Brian Boru, and his friends," said Mr. McConkey, seeing the fatal joint in the armour of his opponents and slipping in with a readiness all his own.

In a moment, Bedlam had broken loose at the FitzWilliam House table, which up to that fatal moment had managed to keep some faint hold on the proprieties.

"Brian Boru is a dirty traitor!" said the little red-headed nurse, flaming. "And so are all his friends."

"So they are," put in one or two other Republican Nurses from the end of the table.

"Traitors? Who are ye callin' traitors?" called out the soft-faced nurse, in a moment transformed into a raging fury. "Weren't the

MAGGIE McCANN

traitors the men that took up arms against their country, that is, the Free State? Who was it commenced the Civil War? Wasn't it Aloysius O'Keeffe, with Sheilah Shaw and Kitty the Devil spurring him on and every she-devil in the Cumann na mBan?"

"Of which you were once a member," retorted one of the nurses on the other side.

Mr. McConkey sat back in his chair and put his crutch down comfortably underneath his chair for the greater enjoyment of the delicious spectacle of his enemies fighting amongst themselves, and in order to light his pipe. His wife made a faint protest, but wasn't it human nature to be glad to see those miserable "Shinners" battling amongst themselves? Miss Cynthia was having the morning of her not over-young life.

"Stop-Press! Stop-Press!" they heard rushing by like a whirlwind and dying away in the distance, for with rumour treading on rumour's heels and with the South divided into half a dozen factions, the Dublin newspapers were reaping a copper harvest.

"And I hope," said nurse Kathleen malignantly, for so soft-faced a woman, "I hope they'll take Aloysius O'Keeffe and his friends and put them with their backs against a wall in Mountjoy and fill them full of Free State lead. . . ."

"At England's behest," snorted her red-headed antagonist, breaking in.

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

"No, at Ireland's," said another Free State nurse coming to the rescue.

"Exactly what I said, and for Ireland's good," said Mr. McConkey as a lull came in the conversation and fearing a suspension of hostilities.

"If they shoot Aloysius, the bravest of the brave," said Biddy, the red-headed nurse, "they will shoot out of the Irish race its last trace of chivalry and justice. Ireland will go down to history as a Judas amongst the nations--they that only wanted to go on fighting for the Republic in which all of them, both Free Stater and Republican, once believed. I hope to God, like thousands of others, that the English will come back!"

At that fateful moment, a figure stood in the doorway, in its hands a "Stop-Press."

Maggie McCann stood there, a figure of fate, her thin high nose hooking itself out strongly from between the moist grey eyes, dressed in her thin grey dress and with her iron-grey hair all tousled from under the great black hat which she wore on one side. She looked ridiculous, disjointed, but strangely impressive.

"Shoot them! They've done it." She read out from the pink paper in her hand:

We are officially informed that Aloysius O'Keeffe was shot by order of the Government at 8 o'clock this morning in the Mountjoy barracks. Before he died he had an affecting interview with Mr. Brian O'Rourke, who had

MAGGIE McCANN

signed the death-warrant, telling him that he forgave him freely and that he was never to regret having done what he conceived to be his duty. The firing party, it is said, wept as they raised their rifles against their old comrade.

“They have killed Ireland’s bravest and best,” said Miss Maggie McCann, “but they have not killed Ireland.”

They all stared at her as though she were a madwoman. Even Mrs. McConkey found herself unequal to the situation and sat bolt upright in her chair without attempting interference.

“They have got us broken and destroyed, fighting amongst ourselves. They have set treachery and worse than treachery at work amongst us—but is it not rather we ourselves who have done so? Never has Ireland been so broken, so betrayed, so destroyed—but Ireland is still Ireland.” The mad grey eyes were looking up in the corner of the room as though their owner saw out of place and time.

“Ireland lies bleeding. But Ireland is still Ireland. The people that live upon her breast come and go—but Ireland goes on for ever.

“Not always shall Ireland lie thus. Not always shall she be the prey of the time-server and the spy. She shall yet hold a torch to the future, as she did once before in the past when Europe was a howling wilderness and she a rushlight in that wilderness. Once more, in the days that are

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

coming, Europe shall be a howling wilderness, and Ireland, once more, a rushlight in that desolation."

The woman was panting as though something were tearing at her inside. The little red-headed nurse was weeping silently—nurse Donovan's little dark head was raised, a new light in her eyes.

And then Miss McCann had come to herself.

"I would like a nice strong cup of tea," said Miss Maggie McCann, who, for the first time in the memory of mortal, had forborne to burst into poetry.

CHAPTER XXVI

JUDAS

JASPER MORIARTY sat in the little back room in the house on the quay reading the scrap of paper in his hands. A dirty scrap of paper covered with pencil marks, the thing that was to deliver his enemy into his hands.

For many months, indeed ever since the Treaty, Jasper Moriarty had kept his nose to the trail, the scent sometimes weak, sometimes strong in his nostrils. First it had been the Castle that had put him on the trail, but he knew, if none had been there to unleash him, he would have unleashed himself on the trail at the end of which was the woman he once loved and now hated—Sheilah Shaw.

For months, this woman who had scouted him, who had called him Judas, who had refused to save him from himself by going away with him, had run free. For months he had tried to place the snare about her which would have delivered her up to the Castle authorities. But now there were other rulers in Ireland, and she a rebel in arms against them. He had tried to get these

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

rulers to let him hunt her down, but they would not use even him. As always, nobody trusted him.

Here was he, Jasper Moriarty, almost at the end of the trail and at the end of the road, a man who had sold himself, not for money as those God blasted Sinn Feiners had believed in the unimaginative crookedness of their hearts, but for love. For love that was hate.

Here he sat, with Molly doing a bit of dusting out there in the shop amongst the books and oil-skins and the children, his children, playing around her legs. She, the one thing that loved him on earth, really loved, not with the selfish love of that other woman who put Ireland first. She, the woman who had lain in his arms and mothered his children, knowing no more of him than if he had been a Chinaman.

Well, there had been one other who cared for him unselfishly. Shaun the Watcher now lying in his grave. Shaun was the one man that wished him well—he had always believed that from the time they were in the Rising together. He had been sorry for Shaun and fearful for him, because he had feared that in trailing Sheilah he also might put the snare about Shaun himself, though he knew that were he not a dead man, he would have sacrificed even Shaun to his hate and revenge.

That cold woman of the grey eyes that he had loved so passionately through the years, the woman who with a nod of her head could have

JUDAS

saved him, had refused the love that was burning in her own heart and had scorned him.

The time was when he thought to have the long revenge on a woman who would die in gaol, snared like a bird. But now he wanted more than gaol. He wanted her life—the thing for which she cared so little—for even in this his revenge would not be complete. Nothing with him could ever be complete—it was not for him or the likes of him ever to have satisfaction in this life.

The long years stretched themselves behind him from the old days in the monastery school with Sergeant Michael MacGuire, and he, Jasper, ambitious as hell, tryin' to win his exhibitions and to be first, and he always stopped and thwarted. Up the long years when he toiled through the long days as a boy at Jacobs' and then to that first realization of ambition—to that day when he went, a scallywag reporter on the "Sniper," and then that other great lift, sweet to the taste, when he was made its sub-editor.

And then the long years when he had tried to serve Ireland and the jealousy of him and the way in which he had been held back as though by invisible powers when he tried to work himself forward. And then the creation of the Moriarty legend—the Judas legend which had sent him to his appointed goal as surely as though he had been placed on rails and flung downwards.

It wasn't he, Jasper Moriarty, that was to blame in all this. It wasn't his fault that he, a

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

young green boy, had married the first comely young woman who had shown an interest in him—Molly out there, and so helped to put the shackles around his own feet. It wasn't his fault that to see Sheilah was to love her, and she confessing her love and with that blind bitter sacrifice of the Irish refusing to bless him, refusing to live with him either in secret or in the open, and at the long last refusing to go across the salt seas with him to a new country where he could make a new start and get level with life.

He had gone into the Rising with his heart high and, as he knew, now, when he seemed to be finished with everything, whole-souled and whole-hearted for Ireland. He had placed his tongue and his pen and the printed page at the service of his country—only to become the despised, the rejected of men; he, the man that nobody trusted, and he, as he knew in this moment, on the threshold of something—perhaps on the threshold of death itself.

No single man had gone out that Easter Monday morning with higher hope or truer heart than he. It was not his courage that failed him in the house near the viaduct but his faith—the faith broken by his knowledge of his countrymen and the realization that they were dying for a dream. He knew now, when again he felt in that fateful way that there was nothing to conceal or to lie about to himself any more than to his God, that he would have fought alone and to the end through burning flame and scalding jet if he

JUDAS

had been sure of Ireland and his comrades. All that was true.

What other avenue was open to him when those devils at the Castle offered him realization and promotion? It was as inevitable as fate. And yet he had not sold himself to his country's enemies for ambition—he had gone into their service through hate, and not hate of them so much as hate of his own. Hate of all those who had refused to trust him, who had put the name of "Judas" on him.

He looked at himself in the little glass that hung opposite on the wall, he the man whose hair was once black as night, now with the rough grey strands running through it and the fine network of lines on the white face on which the crimson lips stood out. It wasn't he that had done that to himself.

He knew, he knew in that moment, that if he could lay Ireland under the sea for twenty-four hours by a thought, he would think it without a qualm.

And his sister Honora and that black devil who had struck under her—and that night on the road to Gurt, and he, all unknowin' waitin' under the trees to betray his own sister to that black fiend. And then the trap-door in the roof and the Phooka jump on the back of the betrayer and then the dizzy air of the lime-kiln and Michael MacGuire sinking down on the floor that was to him the red hot hearthstone of hell.

There, anyhow, was green accomplishment,

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

something that had grown in the barren waste of his life.

And here in his hands was the piece of paper with Sheilah's handwriting on it—the piece of paper that lay at the end of the long trail, asking him to meet her in her hiding hole and she “on the run” from her own countrymen, God damn her!

Why! and his heart burst upwards for one moment as the thought came to him—maybe she was willing now to come to him and to go away with him. But it was too late for that.

He would strangle her with his own hands so as to give her time, before she died, to know what she had done to two human souls. He would take that smooth white neck between his fingers and crush the life out of her inch by inch and as he did it he would speak to her and tell her what she had to be told.

The hell-woman! She comin' to him now when all was gone and all broken down into ruin irretrievable—comin' to take up the threads of their lives and they broken in a thousand pieces! He knew that if he went to hell after he did what he had to do, he would pay the price and with joy. Not even hell could stifle the satisfaction of satiated hate.

And here he had come to the end of the road. Deserted by the Castle with no further use for him and the Treaty signed, deserted by his comrades, in neither the Republican nor the Free State camp—he stood a lonely man on the

JUDAS

face of Ireland. No single man or woman in the world save the little unseeing woman outside in the shop, caring whether he lived or died . . . unless Sheilah cared, and that too late.

He put the paper in his pocket and took up his hat. Down the length of the quay he walked and over the bridge and so at last to Great Brunswick Street and to the old tenement house where the letter told him he would find her.

Moscha! but wasn't it the queer place and all! There were the dirty little Dublin children playing around in the street in the September afternoon and up and down and over the broken steps leading to the old door, magnificently carved, propped open on one hinge. And there, at the bottom of the stairs, was a little golden-haired child playing with her rag doll and she cryin' her eyes out because the doll had lost its head.

Sure but wasn't he the queer man and he with all that on him not able to pass the innocent child without sitting down there beside her and tryin' to comfort her and tyin' on the ould head on to the trunk with his handkerchief. And the woman he loved once and hated now, waitin' there up the broad broken stairs.

And here was the child puttin' her little dirty hand in his and sayin' something to him. What was that?—that "she'd take him up to the lady who was waitin' for him." Even the children were spies in Ireland . . . but wasn't she the cute child all the same?

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

And so up the stairs with them and the little thing had left him opposite the closed door on the top landing and had toddled down again, one step at a time, with her doll hanging in the hollow of her arm, having done her work. There he stood looking at the old carved door with its great brass knocker, a devil with its tongue out that grinned at him malignantly, he staring at the knocker and the knocker staring at him.

What was on the other side? There was murder on the other side. He knew that. When he came out of that room it would be to leave a dead woman behind him to rot in that deserted house from which came neither sound nor stir.

How cool he was and how cold. Not a stir in his heart. Not a tremble of the hands and he looking at the long slender fingers, looking to the work they had to do. And he patted his pocket, taking no chances as always, for who knew what might be behind a Dublin door?

He put his hand on the door handle. How cold it felt that clammy September day. Then he had opened it. Facing him was an old and empty room without even a chair in it, the walls peeling and patched and the sullen shadows of the September afternoon slowly invading it from the two high dirty windows. Not a sound. Not a stir.

Maybe she had tricked him after all.

But on the other side of the room, facing him, he saw another door. He would see what there

JUDAS

might be in that room. And then, as he looked, he caught the glimmer of light underneath the door.

He turned the handle and opened it to see nothing there in the wide world but a guttering candle on a little table and not a soul in the place. But as his eyes grew accustomed to the place and the things there began to take form, he saw her, like a ghost.

She was sitting facing the door and looking stedfastly at him from the other side of the candle, which had prevented him seeing her when he had first entered. The beautiful head was resting easily in the smooth white hand.

"Is that you, Jasper?" came the old mellifluous voice that had once thrilled him and that now sent the blood creeping away from his heart with the hate of it.

There she was and there lay the work to his hands.

"Ah, but 'tis long since we met, Jasper," she said. "And much has happened since then." But still the tall man stood there silent before her.

He would play with her before he did it. He would find out all that was in her black heart.

"Yes, I'm here, Sheilah," he said, and his voice, to himself, sounded very far away.

"I got your letter." He laid it on the table before her.

"Maybe you'll have been wonderin' why it was I wrote you that letter?" she asked in that cold gentle way. For a moment he forgot his sullen

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

inburning anger and he stared at her, her voice was so gentle.

Something stirred in the corner, and then he heard a tiny scratching.

"'Tis only a rat," she said and she smiled a little.

He waited in the silence for what she would say.

"Jasper," she said, "there is a lot that must pass between us this night—a lot to be explained and understood. A lot I have learned since that night in the studio when I showed you the cruel heart and sent you away empty."

So he had not been wrong. She did want him to go away with her. In spite of himself, all his old love and hope welled up in his heart for a moment and then died away again under the upsurging of the black tide of his hate.

It was too late for that now.

"You remember, Jasper, when first you and I met. It was in the old Gaelic League rooms at the top of Rutland Square, and you know how it was with me from the first moment. I had never looked that way at any man before and I loved you—loved you without keeping anything back—loved you in the great way.

"You remember how we both gave ourselves to Ireland and how we worked for her in the long years between then and the Rising and you know how our hopes were doomed.

"Oh, but I tell ye, Jasper Moriarty, that you were not wrong in what you said to me those

JUDAS

two times—once in the house on the quay and once in my own house. I did not think those things that time, but I think them now . . . since the Treaty and the Civil War and the shooting of Aloysius and other things. It was you that had the right and I the wrong. And there are many of us that know that now.”

His heart again leaped within despite himself. She had come to understanding. But he stifled that back and tried to remember what he had to do and looked again at his thin white hands.

“Somebody once said that we Irish talked the big things and meant the big things but that sorrow and suffering and other things had taken the power of their fulfilment from our hearts and lives. All that was true. You said we did not trust one another. All that was true. And you said that the men who laid down their young lives for Ireland were doing it for a dream and not for a reality. That was also true.”

“Oh! you understand at last, Sheilah,” he said, taking a step towards the woman seated beside the candle, “for all that your understanding has come too late.”

“It has come too late, Jasper,” the woman said quietly, “too late to save either you or me or Ireland.” And she was silent a moment as she listened to the scratching behind the bookshelves in the corner.

“The rats are already at work on Ireland—Ireland is finished.”

The man looked at her a moment, and then he

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

felt he had to say it: "If you had only listened that time when I told you I loved you and had gone away with me to America."

"Yes, if I had only listened, Jasper. But I couldn't. There was that in me calling deeper than Jasper Moriarty, deeper than love—that was Ireland, because Ireland had all of love and life in it that time. Ireland is like a proud woman that does not share her love with anything else on earth. Oh! the bitter-sweet thing that is Ireland."

The man before her felt something surge within him. And then he had sprung towards her.

"It is not too late," he said. "Not even now." He bent down close to her to stare into the dear grey eyes. But she did not move.

"Listen, Sheilah, and I will tell you all. I came here to take your life. I came here to do what I had been trying to do for months because you put the black scorn on me and I hated you as the woman who had sent me straight to the pit. Never up to that moment in the studio had I surrendered. It was from there and the memory of you that I went to the Castle and sold myself not for money, not for love, but for hate.

"But Sheilah! asthore, I love you now and always. I love you sleeping and waking, standing up or lying down." Again he bent over her and then he had taken her in his arms, but still the cold grey eyes looked into his, unflinching, but now alight and staring under the stimulus of his words.

JUDAS

The great hope surged within him. This time she would yield and come away with him for them both to find happiness and forgetfulness on the other side of the Atlantic.

The soft breasts were rising and falling as he came yet closer, the eyes dropped a moment, and then he had pressed her close to him and once more as in that day of long ago he was raining kisses on her lips and face and she, unstruggling, like a bird caught in the net but yielding itself to what must be. But a bird that did not flutter its wings. Her arms hung downwards by her sides as she lay in his arms, unresisting, like a dead woman.

He held her a little from him, affrighted at this deadness, thinking perhaps that she had fainted, only to see those eyes fixed on him, cold and grey and remote like those of the Shan van Vocht herself, fixed upon him with so deadly an indifference that he involuntarily opened his arms and let her escape.

"So once more you made your mistake, Jasper," she said quietly. "That time before in the studio, you thought to buy me with my love, then you thought to sell me to the English, and now to-night, to buy me again like a pig, or a goat or a sheep.

"Listen, Jasper Moriarty, for the last time," and now Sheila was standing before him. "Never from that moment when you left me in the studio to go out to sell yourself to the English, have you been unwatched. Day and night,

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

sleeping and waking, you have been trailed—even down to the house here in Brunswick Street. It was Shaun who trailed you.

“Shaun was the man on the donkey on the road to Gurt. Shaun was the man that saw you walk down the hill outside the Castle the day you came out from your temptation. He was the man who, until he died of hunger, tracked you day and night . . . to this.”

Shaun, his friend, the one man he had trusted!

In that moment, Jasper Moriarty let go his hold on life.

“Liar; traitor; Judas!” she said and was silent.

The blood had rushed back to his heart and up through his throat to choke him, and had mounted into his brain. Then it had ebbed again, to leave him cold and white.

He went out from her without a word, closing the door carefully behind him.

.

There in the shadows of the Dublin twilight, she waited. She waited, but no sound came from the room beyond—the closing of no distant door to tell her that she was alone.

Through the long minutes she waited, and then she had walked over to the door and had opened it quickly, the candle in her hand scarcely piercing the shadows more than an arm's length away. The room was empty.

JUDAS

A little air blew on her face.

She peered through the shadows to see the outer door a little open and something lying huddled and hanging on the face of it.

Hanging from the heavy knocker by his braces, lay Jasper Moriarty, the pale eyes open in the white face with the red lips and black beard to show themselves under the light of the candle.

She stood there looking at the eyes like a woman under a spell. Something slowly withered in her face. She had in that moment become an old woman. Then she had straightened herself.

"It was well done," said Sheilah.

She bent down and kissed him on the forehead.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PASSING OF BRIAN

THE spring and the summer that followed the signature of the Treaty had passed amidst the clangour of faction and the opening of Civil War. It was in the warm russet of September that Brian Boru had begun that great tour of the West which was to finally convince Ireland and himself of the inevitableness of compromise. After all, was not the West "the heart of Ireland?" If he could convince the West, he could convince Ireland, Ireland, sick of fighting, only too ready to be convinced.

How different this tour from that of only eighteen months before which he and Moira had made together.

That last time, he and Moira had been speaking from the same platforms, carrying the fiery torch of insurrection through the rebel West, each supporting the other--behind them, a united Ireland. To-day, Brian's work, trailed by his wife, was being undone meeting by meeting. Everywhere that he spoke in favour of compromise and of the Treaty to which he had set his hand,

THE PASSING OF BRIAN

his wife followed him to denounce him and those who thought with him.

And behind them both, an Ireland locked in fratricidal strife—an Ireland of faction and Civil War.

Every bit of logic was on his side, and with it the older priests and all the bishops—and, on the other side of the Irish Sea, the mass of the English. He had sense and logic and the Church. He had behind him priests like Father Hickey of Grana and little *gombeen* men like Father Hickey's friend, and the mass of the little shopkeepers and the farmers, all of whom "only wanted peace to make their little profits."

"A pack of idjits!" as the big round-headed priest had called the Republicans at his last meeting in Tuam, where a letter from the bishop had been read declaring that by their crimes against the new Free State they had placed themselves outside the laws of God and man.

Brian knew that the fight for a Republic was hopeless, that England was only waiting to pour her troops back over Ireland, and so finish for ever her pretensions to independence. It was queer that the Cumann na mBan and Moira couldn't see something that was as plain as the nose on your face—but so it was.

But the strangest thing of all was that he, Brian himself, like his colleagues, was uneasy. He had everything on his side—and nothing. The men who went out in 1916 were only two thousand souls and they had against them, as

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Brian well knew, not only the might of an Empire but the opinion of their own countrymen and countrywomen, who only rallied to them afterwards because there was something in that unconscious soul of Ireland which blindly, time and time again, struggled upwards into consciousness and understanding.

There was not one of them that didn't feel worried to death. Here was he sitting in the little parlour of the hotel in Ballydoyle. He had just come away from the great meeting in the square where thousands had cheered him and thousands had groaned him—and he felt as so many of his own friends felt, that Ireland was like a woman tearing at her own vitals. But the majority had been with him. Yet political victories were not always spiritual victories. And where was it all to end?

There was Moira, now. Town by town and village by village she, with her great golden eyes and red hair, had been a flame on his trail, everywhere denouncing him as traitor—he the father of her children and calling his reward as minister, blood-money. There was his friend, Tom Kearney, and his wife doing the same thing against him—scorning him as though he had been an outcast because he was a minister of the Free State—and his other friend, a general in the army of the Free State—that army which itself was split from crown to heel and half a dozen factions in each split.

House against house, and the very brothers

THE PASSING OF BRIAN

and fathers and mothers and sisters in the same house hating and killing.

Sure didn't the two Caseys, two brothers on opposite sides, come home each Saturday from killing their countrymen and agree to a truce until Monday morning and then go back to the gun—one finally killing the other ?

Of course he wanted a Republic the same as the others. Didn't all of them put their hand to the Treaty with their tongues in their cheeks and with black anger in their hearts ? But what was the use of going against the facts ?

And here was the fight knit in that Kilbride to which he was now going. This was to be the decisive demonstration in favour of the Treaty and a hundred thousand people expected. Moira and the Republicans had taken up the challenge and had declared that they intended to hold their counter-demonstration in the same square and on the same day as their opponents, and there would be murder that day unless one or the other gave way—and the British Empire laughing.

He knew that she was on her way to Kilbride to hold her meeting. And all Ireland laughing and crying at the spectacle of husband and wife fighting one another and the English reporters taking down every word and setting it out in heavy leaded capitals for the edification of their readers and of America.

Well, but there was the chance that what he feared would not happen. For he also knew that having missed her train and none running on

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Sunday from Ballydoyle, the chances were she would not be able to reach Kilbride in time for the counter-demonstration of which she was the heart. She had been all over Ballydoyle to get a motor that would bring her to the meeting in time and no high-power car available for the roughest bit of country in the West—bogs and mountains. If he hadn't his own big car with him he couldn't get there himself.

But whether she reached Kilbride or not—where was it to end at all, at all ?

He sat there, his head bowed in his hands, wondering his way out of all this, when the door opened and there stood Moira, the aureole of her hair framed in the sun that came through the little narrow window, and she big with child.

"Moira!" he said, standing up.

But she looked past him and was about to close the door to go out again when he walked quickly over and with sudden resolve, said to her :

"Will you not speak to me ? There is more hanging on this chance meeting than either you or I—there is Ireland."

The great golden eyes envisaged him and then she had closed the door and had come over to him.

"I know, Moira, that you are on your way to Kilbride, to hold the counter-demonstration on Sunday, and I will only say this to you—you are welcome to a seat in my car if it will help you to get there in time. I know there isn't a car in all the place that can get you there in time except mine. I have heard all about it."

THE PASSING OF BRIAN

She looked at him, for a moment, disarmed.

"We can talk as we ride," he said.

"I accept for my people but not for myself," she said proudly.

They went down the narrow stairs and, to the great astonishment of the hotel people, they passed together into the car that had been waiting at the door to carry him away.

They did not talk. The big car with Brian at the steering wheel swept out of the square of the little town and along the narrow white limestone road that wound through the low foothills which gave on to the great plains of the West. There it stretched itself before them like a white ribbon across the vast plain which spread amongst the purple heather to the faint blue haze where the Seven Pins stood, ghostly sentinels on the further horizon. And in all that vast expanse under the gold and purple glory of autumn, there was neither smoke nor life.

The bog pools lay like bowls of iridescent colour spilled into the heathy hollows, first under the high sun of noon and then, as the evening began to creep up stealthily bringing with it the peace of God, in dark and gracious colours. And, part of stone and peat and water, invisible until they came upon them, the children of the Gael, with their bare legs and feet, wild elfish creatures of other worlds, looking out at them from the roadside.

Over the Irish countryside lay the hush of

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

God, and the big man at the wheel and the woman by his side, silent.

But once a yellowhammer twittered uneasily from a broken stone fence and once a blackbird flew shrieking before them on the road—a lonely straggler from the bushy country.

League on league they unrolled the ribbon of the road beneath their flying wheels and nothing there about them now but the *cluricaune* and the fairy, and God Almighty.

The peat streams ran without ripple among the bogs with their amber waters and the scent of the earth coming from the heart of them. A solitary foxglove stood upright watching by the side of a bog stream, and once they saw a hare crouching by the side of the road unmoving.

Over the little stone bridges and the running brooks and the speckled trout holding themselves silently in the heart of the flowing water—all was silent in that waste.

The whole plain lay in the hand of God and every creature in it was stilled this afternoon of autumn.

Overhead, a wedge of wild duck clove its path through the high clean air, with the autumn sun going down in the western sky, in a golden glory, to set behind a cleft in the pinnacles to which they were coming, and on the other side of which, many weary miles away, lay Kilbride.

They were coming up the cleft between the mountains on a road which hung like an eyebrow

THE PASSING OF BRIAN

to the face of the precipice on their left. And then, as they swept round the bend, they saw before them, held in the hollow made by three sheer conical mountains, a little lake, with an island in the middle lying gold and purple and green under the setting sun.

Out there in the centre of the lake lay the little island across which a man might walk in a couple of strides, the nesting place of the wild duck. There it lay in the midst of unruffled water, set by the great steeps running up about it and holding it as in a cup. The cradle of the eternal silence of the hills.

All at once, the man at the wheel stopped to look stedfastly towards the sun setting behind the distant rosy spurs.

"I think 'tis here we'd better be talkin', Moira," he said.

"I think it is, Brian," she answered.

There was the sort of peace between them as though they were at the gates of heaven—and nothing more to be said.

A brace of wild duck circled slowly down upon the island. Brian and Moira watched them in their wheeling and as they sank to rest it was as though they too, also, were settling down to rest.

They walked together down to the little green circle on the foreshore of the darkling waters and watched the trout slowly rising and turning under the last rays of the dying sun. Moira, big with child, sat on a great round stone, with

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

Brian standing there on the edge of the lake and looking out into the distance.

He looked at her sitting there big with child under the setting sun. And as he looked, it seemed to come to him all at once that there was nothing to say, maybe—that all had been said—that what had been done was done and had made all saying superfluous.

“Moirá,” said he suddenly. “What is it that we have done to Ireland and Ireland done to us ?”

“I don’t know, Brian,” she said and she looked at him straight from under level brows.

“It was like this,” he said. “One day, and Ireland was heart and soul together, and the next, and there was no Ireland—only a quagmire of faction and intrigue and bloody murder, with brother killing brother.”

“That is always the way with Ireland, Brian,” she answered simply.

“And what is it that we two have done to one another ?” he asked again.

“We have only done to one another what Ireland is always doin’ to all—the Ireland that takes everything and yields nothing. Only sometimes I do be thinkin’ that that is not Ireland at all but the Irish breed lying on the face of her. But God alone knows that.” She went on :

“Ah, but ’tis we that are the easy people that can pass from hell to heaven and back again, in a thought, so that the man who will die one day for a united Ireland will die the next for a dis-

THE PASSING OF BRIAN

united. And the world laughin' at us, and we laughin' at one another."

He was silent for a long time looking out over the lake and watching the orange moon as it rose between a hollow of the hills.

"There were you and I, Moira, and we in love one wid the other, and look at us now. . . ."

"Look at us now," she repeated, the red of her hair between her hands and staring out over the waters.

"There was Jasper Moriarty and he once the hero and the young Cuchulain, and look at him now, and he lying low this day, dead by his own hand. And look at Sheilah and all of us at one another's throats and we with hope dead in us and Aloysius O'Keeffe stiff in the gaol clay. Oh, 'twas Shaun the Watcher that was the lucky man and he dead in Mountjoy.

"Ireland takes all and asks all," he went on as though to himself. "All that is beautiful and young and fair she turns into dust and ashes. She that is the island of broken hopes, of saints and cynics, the island of beautiful lies. A shadow-isle, spell-bound, the victim of her own magic; an angel haunted by apes. To everything that is beautiful in her, she has the thing that counters it. She that poisons herself, that destroys herself."

Again he was silent as he looked at the rising of the moon.

"And what are ye goin' to do, now, Brian?"

"Do? Hold that meeting in Kilbride with

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

you on the heels of me, treadin' on your own flesh and blood, like a man treading on his own entrails? Go from one town to another talkin' of things in which I don't believe, or you, either—draggin' out the time like Leyrach Hen, a poor ould man carryin' stones? Is that what I am to do and you with the childer and all and I without a home or a friend."

"You, without a home or a friend," she confirmed.

"And another child, the last, comin'," he went on. "And it like the rest, without a father."

"What are ye goin' to do, Brian?" she asked, and she looked at him strangely there in the moonlight. "You talk as though you were finished with everything. . . ."

"And I am that," he replied. "I am finished with all and everything and all and everything is finished with me."

"The thing I thought to love and cherish I put my hand against as a man sets his hand against his own life. The thing that I loved I now hate and the sun settin' in my heart and the red moon risin'. Look out there." He pointed as he spoke to the great tawny orb, lifting serenely.

"And I, Brian, love you—love you now again in the long last when it is too late, because of the things that we have done to one another and to Ireland and that Ireland has done to us. And I love you for that, too."

THE PASSING OF BRIAN

They were both silent together and she sitting on her stone and he standing looking out into the lake.

"I'm goin' out for a swim," he said all at once.

She understood him perfectly.

"The waters out there in the middle of the lake near the island they do be sayin' are as cold as death, Moira."

"They are, Brian," and her voice was very tender in a moment. It was the first time she had used his name that way for many months and he looked wistful at her with his great dark eyes as she did so. But her eyes were dry.

"I never heard tell of anyone swimmin' across that lake, Moira—but I have the fancy for it. . . . Maybe I won't be comin' back, girl," he added after a little.

She did not answer him, but there was the great understanding between them.

"I must go back to the children and for the little life that is stirrin' in me," she said, inconsequently.

"I know that, Moira," he said and began slowly to undress. His collar caught a little and he tugged at it impatiently.

"The boys always knew I was a good swimmer and fond of the water. That's why I'm takin' off me clothes," he added apologetically.

The woman sat there on the big stone, the red of her hair shining under the blood-red moon and the head bowed between the knees which

THE ISLE OF GHOSTS

came thinly up under the softness of her dress.

" 'Tis time to make an end, Brian." And her voice was strangely soft as she looked at the curly head of him, her big golden eyes aglow under the rising of the moon.

A bird cried far out on the island as the great orb swung itself in lonely majesty high above the cleft of the hills to bathe one half of the darkling waters with its mellow glow and to leave the rest in the black shadow.

And now Brian was standing by the edge of the lake, white and cold as a ghost, his clothes lying about him on the rocks like the shell of a mortality from which he was escaping. He did not look towards her, but his white body shivered a little in the moony light.

And then he had walked into the water, slipping a little on the stones of the lake as he went. And behind him, on the green circlet of the shore, his wife, still looking at him and he speaking neither to himself nor to her but to the waters and the hills and the great red-gold moon now swimming serenely in the upper air—speaking to Ireland—and yet speaking to her, too :

" It's all right now, Moira," came the voice from the dark waters. " I see what I could not see before, for the sight has come to me at the long last. I see that there is something destroyed in Ireland—but that Ireland, all the same, holds all the sweetness of life and of death. She cannot save herself, but she can yet save others.

" . . . we stood for a free Ireland before we

THE PASSING OF BRIAN

ourselves were free, as though a man could take the shadow and lose the substance." He was now almost up to his waist and the waters grew out in great ripples about him.

"And so there came the first child, the child on which I swore that I would never turn back . . . and then the virtue had gone out of me and I not knowin' it.

"And, Moira," the voice came faintly over the waters, "bring up the child that is comin', to see Ireland as she is. Bring him to see the illusion the meanness and the ugliness before his young heart, like mine is broken . . . to see them and yet keep his enchantments and his love for the Irish earth and the Irish spirit."

"I will, Brian," she answered him low, her eyes fixed on the rippling water and on the dark head that was swimming now as it forged steadily out under the blood-red moon. Out and out it made its way, as she looked, and then it had slipped easily under the dark waters and there was the great calm over all.

.

EPILOGUE.

THREE white-haired women sat together over a nice strong cup of tea in the FitzWilliam House maternity home in Stephens Green, Dublin.

"How quare it is to think of them times twenty years ago when all Ireland stood together and the Risin' and the comin' of the Terror and the Black and Tans and all," said one of them, a little woman with dark eyes.

"And the fun and all we used to have," said the big woman with the soft wrinkled face to whom she had spoken. "The shootin' and the boys on the run and some of them killed like your own boy, and the day Brian Boru came here in the room upstairs to visit his wife Moira when he sent me down to watch the back of the house and the declaration of the Irish Republic and all."

"Oh, yes, Kathleen," said the other. "And the shootin' of Aloysius O'Keeffe and the drownin' of Brian Boru, and his wife up there this day in their house, a broken ould woman before her time and all her children grown up and gone away from her to America."

"But it was the great entertainment, entirely,

EPILOGUE

nurse," returned the big soft-faced woman. "And do ye remember the Free State and the fights with the Republicans and all. Glory be to God! but them were the times. Afther all, when all's said and done, Ireland is a great country, broken and all as she is and she widout a spark of life in her this day."

"And that poor cracked ould creature there in the corner and her prophesyin' and the poetry she used to be recitin' those times and she to-day without a line in her. And sure didn't she in her cups, as you might say, for she was always the great tay drinker, didn't she that day upstairs start prophesyin' on her own account the day that Aloysius O'Keeffe was shot, and she talkin' the wild nonsense and sayin' that Ireland was deathless. . . ."

"Deathless!" said Maggie McCann coming to her feet from where she crouched in the corner, the light coming into the grey eye now rheumed with age, "aye and deathless she is. She has killed her dearest and best, but Ireland will rise again, rise through death and love to save herself from herself and maybe to save the world.

"I think I'll have another cup of good hot tay," said Maggie McCann, falling back into her corner.

FINIS



SOUTH AFRICAN
PUBLIC LIBRARY,

CAPE OF GOOD HOPE